

**The role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth:  
an exploratory study**

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## List of Contents

List of Contents .....	ii
List of Tables, Figures and Charts .....	xiii
List of Abbreviations .....	xxi
Acknowledgements .....	xxii
Abstract .....	xxiii
Declaration .....	xxiv
Publications .....	xxiv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the research.....	1
1.2 Rationale for the research .....	2
1.3 A case for augmented SME growth .....	3
1.4 Research question, aim and objectives .....	4
1.5 Thesis structure .....	6
1.6 Chapter summary .....	9
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Research question and aim .....	11
2.3 Research objectives .....	12

2.4 Literature research strategy - a systematic literature review .....	12
2.4.1 Academic literature search.....	13
2.4.2 Snowballing (Backward).....	14
2.4.3 Grey literature capture .....	15
2.6 The evolution of leadership.....	17
2.7 Socially enabling leadership .....	21
2.7.1 Servant leadership .....	22
2.7.2 Ethical leadership.....	25
2.7.3 Authentic leadership.....	26
2.8 The evolution of entrepreneurship .....	32
2.9 The convergence of leadership and entrepreneurship .....	37
2.10 The evolution of entrepreneurial leadership .....	38
2.10.1 Entrepreneurial leadership with social intentions .....	46
2.10.2 Entrepreneurial leadership and social responsibility in SMEs .....	48
2.10.3 Defining entrepreneurial leadership with economic intentions .....	49
2.11 Entrepreneurial leadership growth intentions in Northern Ireland SMEs .....	51
2.12 Entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth.....	61
2.12.1 A definition of the SME.....	63
2.12.3 A context of SME growth in the UK .....	67
2.11.4 A context of SME growth in Northern Ireland.....	70
2.13 Entrepreneurial leadership as an enabler of economic SME growth .....	74
2.13.1 Importance of enabling economic SME growth .....	74
2.13.2 Obstacles to economic SME growth.....	75

2.13.3 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth.....	76
2.13.4 The meaning of SME growth to entrepreneurial leaders.....	83
2.14 A proposition for socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership.....	86
2.15 Entrepreneurial leadership enabling social SME growth .....	88
2.15.1 The importance of enabling social SME growth.....	89
2.15.2 Community activities and enabling social SME growth.....	91
2.15.3 Community relations and enabling social SME growth .....	93
2.15.4 Social responsibility and enabling social SME growth .....	96
2.15.4.1 Corporate social responsibility.....	97
2.15.4.2 Industry 5.0 .....	102
2.15.4.3 Sustainable development goals and the circular economy .....	103
2.15.4.4 Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) and B Corporations .....	105
2.15.5 Challenges of measuring SME social growth .....	109
2.16 A conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership & a definition of augmented SME Growth.....	112
Chapter 3 Methodology .....	116
3.1 Introduction.....	116
3.2 Chapter structure.....	116
3.3 Research philosophy .....	117
3.4 Research approach .....	120
3.4 Research methodology.....	123
3.6 Research design.....	126
3.7 Research strategy .....	130

3.7.1 Primary research strategy .....	131
3.7.2 Research time boundary .....	132
3.7.3 Data collection .....	133
3.8 Quantitative research methods .....	133
3.8.1 Sampling approach .....	134
3.8.2 Sample size .....	136
3.8.3 Questionnaire.....	138
3.8.4 Questionnaire design .....	139
3.8.5 Reliability of quantitative research.....	141
3.8.6 Validity of quantitative research.....	141
3.8.7 Pilot study .....	143
3.8.8 Survey procedures for distribution.....	144
3.9 Qualitative research methods .....	145
3.9.1 Data collection method – In-depth interviews .....	146
3.9.2 Sampling approach .....	150
3.9.3 Pilot Study – qualitative semi-structured interviews .....	151
3.9.4 Overview of the interview respondents.....	152
3.10 Methodology for data analysis .....	153
3.10.1 Quantitative data analysis .....	153
3.10.2 Qualitative data analysis .....	154
3.10.3 Integration of the Data Analysis.....	156
3.10.4 Stage One - on-line survey data analysis .....	156
3.10.5 Stage two - interview data analysis .....	157

3.10.6 Stage three - integration of quantitative and qualitative data .....	157
3.11 Computer software .....	158
3.12 Chapter summary .....	158
Chapter 4 Quantitative Research Findings.....	161
4.1 Introduction.....	161
4.2 Data collection and summary of findings.....	162
4.3 Descriptive data - Northern Ireland SME context.....	162
4.3.1. Geographical representation .....	162
4.3.2 Age of SME.....	163
4.3.3 Annual turnover.....	164
4.3.4 Family business .....	164
4.3.5 Size of SME .....	165
4.4 Descriptive Data – The Northern Ireland entrepreneurial leader context.....	166
4.4.1 Entrepreneurial leader – role in the SME.....	166
4.4.2 Entrepreneurial leader – age profile .....	167
4.4.3 Entrepreneurial leader – gender.....	168
4.5 The lifestyle values, perceptions, and intentions of SME entrepreneurial leaders ....	168
4.5.1 Introduction .....	168
4.5.2 Entrepreneurial leader lifestyle values.....	169
4.5.3 Entrepreneurial leader wellbeing.....	172
4.5.4 Entrepreneurial leaders and stakeholder perceptions.....	172
4.6 The Entrepreneurial Leader and economic growth in NI SMEs.....	174
4.6.1 Introduction .....	174

4.6.2 Importance of enabling economic SME growth .....	175
4.6.3 Obstacles to economic SME growth.....	179
4.6.4 Priority measures for enabling economic SME growth - sales, profit, job creation .....	182
4.6.5 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth.....	183
4.7 Entrepreneurial leaders enabling social growth in NI SMEs.....	185
4.7.1 Importance of enabling social SME growth.....	185
4.7.2 Community activities and enabling social SME growth.....	187
4.7.3 Community relations and enabling social SME growth .....	189
4.7.4 Social responsibility and enabling social SME growth .....	193
4.7.5 Entrepreneurial leaders' measurement of non-financial (social) data .....	198
4.8 Entrepreneurial leaders enabling social growth through employees.....	201
4.8.1 Introduction .....	201
4.8.2 Employee wellbeing and enabling social SME growth.....	201
4.8.3 Employee development and enabling social SME growth .....	203
4.8.4 Employee voice and enabling social SME growth .....	204
4.8.5 Employee appraisal and enabling social SME growth .....	205
4.8.6 Community activities enabling social SME growth.....	206
4.8.7 Conclusion .....	208
Chapter 5: Qualitative Research Findings.....	209
5.1 Introduction.....	209
5.2 Interview group analysis .....	209
5.3 Theme A: Entrepreneurial leadership role in SME growth.....	211

5.3.1 Introduction .....	211
5.3.2 Entrepreneurial leader and lifestyle values.....	211
5.3.3 Entrepreneurial leader and wellbeing .....	214
5.3.4 Entrepreneurial leader and stakeholder perceptions .....	215
5.4 Theme B: The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth in NI SMEs.....	216
5.4.1 Introduction .....	216
5.4.2 Importance of enabling economic SME growth .....	216
5.4.3 Obstacles to economic SME growth.....	218
5.4.4 Job creation and priority measures for economic SME growth .....	221
5.4.5 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth.....	222
5.4.6 The meaning of SME growth to entrepreneurial leaders.....	222
5.5 Theme C: The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth in NI SMEs.....	224
5.5.1 Introduction .....	224
5.5.2 Importance of social SME growth.....	225
5.5.3 Community activities and enabling social SME growth.....	226
5.5.4 Community relations and enabling social SME growth .....	227
5.5.5 Socially responsible SME growth. ....	229
5.5.6 Sustainability and enabling social SME growth .....	230
5.5.7 Measuring social growth.....	232
5.6 Theme D: The entrepreneurial leader enabling SME social growth through employees .....	233
5.6.1 Introduction .....	233
5.6.2 Employees engaging in community activities and social SME growth .....	234



5.6.3 Employee well-being and enabling SME social growth.....	234
5.6.4 Employee development and enabling SME social growth .....	235
5.6.5 Employee appraisal and enabling social SME growth .....	236
5.6.6 Employee voice and enabling social SME growth .....	237
5.6.7 Conclusion .....	238
Chapter 6: Discussion .....	239
6.1 Introduction.....	239
6.2 Research aim .....	239
6.3 Research objectives .....	239
6.4 Structure of chapter .....	240
6.5 Entrepreneurial leadership enabling augmented SME growth.....	240
6.6 A conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth .....	241
6.7 A composite summary table of key findings: Entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in NI SMEs .....	243
6.8 Theme A: Entrepreneurial leadership work lifestyle values, intentions, and perceptions .....	254
6.8.1 Introduction .....	254
6.8.2 Entrepreneurial leader and work lifestyle values .....	255
6.8.3 Entrepreneurial leaders and personal well-being.....	257
6.8.4 Entrepreneurial leader and stakeholder perceptions .....	259
6.9 Theme B: The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic SME growth.....	262
6.9.1 Introduction .....	262

6.9.2 Importance of entrepreneurial leadership enabling economic SME growth.....	262
6.9.3 Obstacles to economic SME growth.....	266
6.9.4 Priority measures for economic SME growth; jobs, sales, and profit. ....	271
6.9.5 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth.....	274
6.9.6 The meaning of business growth to entrepreneurial leaders .....	275
6.10 Theme C: The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth.....	280
6.10.1 Introduction .....	280
6.10.2 The importance of enabling social SME growth.....	281
6.10.3 Community activities and enabling social SME growth .....	283
6.10.4 Community relations and enabling social SME growth .....	285
6.10.5 Social responsibility and enabling social SME growth .....	286
6.10.6 Measuring social SME growth.....	289
6.11 Theme D: The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth through employees.....	293
6.11.1 Introduction .....	293
6.11.2 Engaging employees in the community and enabling social SME growth.....	294
6.11.3 Employee wellbeing and enabling social SME growth.....	295
6.11.4 Employee development and enabling social SME growth .....	297
6.11.5 Employee appraisal and enabling social SME growth .....	298
6.11.6 Employee voice and enabling social SME growth .....	299
6.12 Entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth .....	300
Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations .....	308
7.1 Introduction.....	308

7.2 Achievement of the research question, objectives, and research aim .....	311
7.2.1 Objective One .....	311
7.2.2 Objective two .....	315
7.2.3 Objective three .....	320
7.2.3.1 The entrepreneurial leaders' personal work intentions (Objective 1 Theme A) Implications for theory, policy, and practice .....	321
7.2.3.2 The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic SME growth (Objective One Theme B) Implications for theory, policy, and practice .....	322
7.2.3.3 The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth (Objective Two Theme C) Implications for theory, policy, and practice .....	323
7.2.3.4 The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth through employees (Objective Two Theme D) Implications for theory, policy, and practice .....	324
7.2.4 Objective four .....	325
7.3 The contribution to knowledge .....	326
7.4 Limitations of the research .....	327
7.6 Chapter summary .....	330
Appendices .....	332
Appendix 1 Questionnaire .....	333
Appendix 2 Participant Information Guide – Quantitative Data Collection .....	351
Appendix 3 Questions for semi-structured interview and guide for participants .....	354
Appendix 4 Participant consent Forms – qualitative data collection .....	356
Appendix 5 Research ethics application .....	357
Appendix 6 Risk assessment record .....	366

Appendix 7 Ethics approval: UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER RESEARCH GOVERNANCE .....	368
Appendix 8 Summary of quantitative findings (Chapter 4) .....	372
Appendix 8a Sample sectoral representation.....	377
Appendix 9 Qualitative analysis strategy and rationale for triangulation of data.....	379
List of References .....	383

## List of Tables, Figures and Charts

### List of Tables

Table 3.1 The primary but conflicting paradigms to build knowledge .....	119
Table 3.2 The three approaches to developing theory. ....	122
Table 3.3 Mixed Methods design and data collection activity.....	127
Table 3.4 The explanatory sequential research design model .....	128
Table 3.5 Profile of quantitative responses in relation to SME Size .....	129
Table 3.6 Profile of qualitative interviews in relation to SME Size .....	130
Table 3.7 Six-part Qualtrics blocks for questionnaire design.....	140
Table 3.8 Rationale for topical questions in semi-structured Interviews. ....	150
Table 3.9 Sample size for semi-structured interviews .....	151
Table 3.10 Interview respondents and number of employees .....	153
Table 3.11 Summary of research approach. ....	160
Table 4.1 SIC (2007) Broad Standard Business Classification .....	377
Table 4.2 Revised assumptions for business size to aid statistical analysis .....	166
Table 4.3 Kruskal-Wallis Test SME size and expectation for SME growth.....	178
Table 4.4 Ranked importance of internal obstacles to business growth .....	179

Table 4.5 Kruskal-Wallis Test SME size and internal obstacles to SME growth ....	180
Table 4.6 Kruskal-Wallis test on significance of community activities .....	186
Table 4.7 Business size groups versus community engagement activities .....	189
Table 4.8 Entrepreneurial leader importance of embedding.....	196
Table 4.9 Statistical Chi Square test for size of SME v business performance .....	200
Table 4.10 Kruskal-Wallis test employee appraisal process v SME size.....	206
Table 5.1 Theme analysis guide for Qualitative semi-structured interviews .....	211
Table 6.1 Composite summary of key findings.....	254

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Thesis Structure .....	7
Figure 2.1 Structure of the literature review establishing knowledge in leadership and entrepreneurship .....	16
Figure 2.2 Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership.....	17
Figure 2.3 The evolving leadership approaches (Harrison, 2018) .....	39
Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth .....	51
Figure 2.5 Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity in Northern Ireland and the UK2002-2018. Source: GEM APS 2002-2018 .....	53
Figure 2.6 Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity in Northern Ireland in 2003-2018 by Council Area, with 95% confidence intervals. Source: GEM APS 2003-2018. ....	54
Figure 2.7 Total early-stage entrepreneurship by age and council area (2016-18). Source: GEM APS 2003-2018. ....	54
Figure 2.8 Growth expectation by employment. Source: GEM APS 2003-2018. ....	55
Figure 2.9 Measure of entrepreneurial leader activity in the population for the different regions in Northern Ireland. Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2018 (UK) Enterprise Research Centre. ....	56
Figure 2.10 Indicators of Business Ambition. Source: Enterprise Research Centre 2018 .....	57
Figure 2.11 Indicators of Personal Ambition Source: Enterprise Research Centre (UK) 2018.....	58

Figure 2.12 Business structure at council level in Northern Ireland. Source: Office for National Statistics (2017) .....	71
Figure 2.13 Positive productivity incidence rate (2014-2017) Source: Enterprise Research Centre (2018).....	71
Figure 2.14 Percentage of businesses by sector in Northern Ireland. Source: IDPR (2018).....	72
Figure 2.15 Small Business enabling and inhibiting factors .....	78
Figure 2.16 The activities of a social entrepreneur (Thompson, 2002) .....	92
Figure 2.17 The conceptual framework aligned to the literature review .....	112
Figure 3.1 The research onion adapted from Saunders et al. (2019).....	159
Figure 6.1 Conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth aligned to themes A-D .....	302
Figure 6.2 Entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth matrix. ....	304
Figure 7.1 Tracking the research objectives across the conceptual framework for exploring the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth .....	309
Figure 7.2 Augmented SME growth Matrix. (Authors Contribution).....	325



## List of Charts

Chart 2.1 The number of businesses in the UK private sector .	69
Chart 2.2 UK Industrial sectors with highest SME turnover and employmen	70
Chart 2.3 Businesses by size in Northern Ireland.	72
Chart 3.1 Geographical location of survey responses	137
Chart 3.2 Age of survey response	138
Chart 4.1 Sectoral spread of survey responses	378
Chart 4.2 SME age of survey response	163
Chart 4.3 Annual turnover of survey responses	164
Chart 4.4 Survey profile of family and non-family SMEs	164
Chart 4.5 SME size of survey responses	165
Chart 4.6 Role profile of participant entrepreneurial leaders	167
Chart 4.7 Age profile of participant entrepreneurial leaders	167
Chart 4.8 Gender profile of participant entrepreneurial leaders	168
Chart 4.9 Summary of lifestyle values, perceptions, and intentions	169
Chart 4.10 Importance of maintaining my work-life balance	170
Chart 4.11 Importance of flexibility with 'personal time' in my business	170
Chart 4.12 Importance of increasing leisure time outside of business	171

Chart 4.13 Importance of flexibility around work/life balance .....	171
Chart 4.14 Importance of own wellbeing by entrepreneurial leaders.....	172
Chart 4.15 Importance of being known as a successful leader in my community. .	173
Chart 4.16 Importance of being perceived as a 'caring' leader in an SME .....	173
Chart 4.17 Importance of attending conferences to improve business knowledge.	174
Chart 4.18 Summary: The SME entrepreneurial leader and economic growth .....	175
Chart 4.19 SME entrepreneurial leaders growing their business next three years.	176
Chart 4.20 Importance of maintaining existing SME size .....	176
Chart 4.21 Importance of utilising government interventions.....	177
Chart 4.22 Importance to grow SME export sales over the next three years .....	177
Chart 4.23 Importance of SME rapid growth for lucrative exit next three years.....	178
Chart 4.24 Impact of Brexit on NI SMEs.....	181
Chart 4.25 Impact of Covid19 on NI SME .....	181
Chart 4.26 Metrics used by entrepreneurial leaders to measure SME growth .....	182
Chart 4.27 Entrepreneurial leader growth plan (intentions) in next 3 years.....	184
Chart 4.28 Importance of engaging in a range of community activities .....	185
Chart 4.29 Types and level of engagement in community engagement activities ..	187
Chart 4.30 Summary: Community relations and enabling NI SME social growth ...	189

Chart 4.31 Importance of having a good relationship with my community.....	190
Chart 4.32 Recognising local community as stakeholders in my business.....	191
Chart 4.33 Importance of generating good for local community business network	191
Chart 4.34 Importance of embedding business in local community development..	192
Chart 4.35 Importance of collaborating through reciprocal relationships.....	192
Chart 4.36 Summary of social responsibility and SME social growth.....	193
Chart 4.37 Importance of ethical standards and practices in supply chain.....	194
Chart 4.38 Efficiency and lean improvement processes in the next 3 years. ....	194
Chart 4.39 Importance of optimising energy/utilities in SMEs .....	195
Chart 4.40 Importance of minimising carbon emissions in SME operations.....	195
Chart 4.41 Embedding environmentally protective processes into operations .....	196
Chart 4.42 Sectoral response to embedding environmental practices .....	197
Chart 4.43 Frequency of non-financial data collection to measure performance....	198
Chart 4.44 Entrepreneurial leaders and social growth through employees .....	201
Chart 4.45 Responsibility for my employee wellbeing over the next three years....	202
Chart 4.46 Wellbeing activities for employees in SMEs over the next 3 years. ....	202
Chart 4.47 Importance to entrepreneurial leaders of developing the skills .....	203
Chart 4.48 Professional development of employees on long/short courses .....	203

Chart 4.49 Employees having a say in operating my SME over next 3 years .....	204
Chart 4.50 Importance of employee appraisal process in SMEs .....	205
Chart 4.51 Encouraging employees to engage with community/school groups .....	207
Chart 4.52 Garnering employee support to engage community fundraisers .....	207
Chart 6.1 Detailed breakdown of impact of Brexit on surveyed SMEs .....	269

## List of Abbreviations

APS	Adult Population Survey
BCorp	Certified B Corporations
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BIS	Department for Business and Innovation Skills (2010)
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
ENI	Enterprise Northern Ireland
ERC	Economic Research Centre
ESG	Environmental and Social Governance
GEM	Global Enterprise Monitor
ICSB	International Council for Small Business
IDBR	Inter Departmental Business Register
NI	Northern Ireland
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PAYE	Pay as you earn
SME	Small to Medium Enterprises
TEA	Total Entrepreneur Activity
VAT	Value added Tax

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**Ancora Imparo... 'I am still learning' (Michelangelo - 87 years)**

## **Abstract**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK account for 99.9% of the business population and are acknowledged as the backbone of economic development (Gebauer et al., 2023; Eggers, 2020). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) assert that SMEs also exhibit social growth and contribute significantly to societal prosperity and cohesion (OECD, 2019). However, there is a paucity of research into the socially enabling entrepreneurial leader and how this might influence economic development beyond that of profit, sales, and job creation (Pauceanu, 2021). Augmented growth encompasses the economic and social value that SMEs contribute to local economic development, societal prosperity, and wellbeing. Indeed, Kuckertz et al. (2023) and Davidsson and Wiklund (2013 p.56) suggest that “research studies focusing on value generated in small business growth beyond amounts would prove to be more meaningful”. This study therefore explores the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

Following a flexible, systematic literature review, a conceptual framework is presented to guide the research process and present the research contribution. Using a mixed methods explanatory sequential approach, 204 entrepreneurial leaders completed a questionnaire followed by 20 semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed using SPSS v26 and NVivo12.

The findings revealed evidence of entrepreneurial leadership generating augmented SME growth and uncovers entrepreneurial leadership as a purposeful enabler of augmented SME growth. As a tangible outcome, a strategic SME growth matrix proposes a relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth, in a flourishing stakeholder driven, economic society. The research also highlights the inadequacy of singular economic measures of SME growth and subsequently proposes an augmented SME growth metric. SME growth policy incorporating a more holistic augmented measure could perhaps more effectively demonstrate the ‘real’ value SMEs contribute to societal prosperity and wellbeing. Implications for entrepreneurial leadership practice suggests a pragmatic integration of environmental and social sustainability innovations to generate augmented SME growth.

**Declaration**

*I confirm that the word count for this thesis is 88,485 words excluding the title page, contents, acknowledgements, abstract, tables, charts, diagrams, appendices, and references.*

**Publications**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to the research**

SMEs have been widely recognised for their contribution to economic development and are therefore a frequent focus for academic research which aims to inform policy design (Curran, 2000; Yu, 2001; Fuller-Love, 2006; Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Rojas-Córdova, 2022).

In 2021, UK SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises with 0-250 employees) accounted for 99.9% of the business population which is 5.9 million businesses (BEIS, 2020). Furthermore, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are recognised as the backbone of every economy (Gebauer et al., 2023; Eggers, 2020) and UK governments typically acknowledge SME growth in their economy using quantitative metrics of sales, profit, job creation and asset growth (Ahmad et al., 2022; Yazdanfar and Ohman, 2018; Invest NI Business Strategy 2017-21 p.2; ONS, 2019). Consequently, academic research on SME growth has commonly centred on economic metrics and on various ways to operationalise this as an entrepreneurial leader (Rao, 2021; Thongyai and Potipiroon, 2022).

However, entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs belong in a society where a growing collective social conscience arguably exists and exploiting opportunity for economic gain alone may be increasingly viewed as a somewhat limited perspective. The rising concept of Industry revolution 5.0 (Xu et al., 2021), is showing a growing interest in core values of human-centricity, sustainability and resilience, which has become a major driving force for social growth instead of profit focused prosperity with recent government activity embedding these values in policy (Paris Agreement, 2015; SDGs 2015; Wellbeing of future generations, 2015; The economy of Wellbeing, Llana-Nozal, 2019; OECD Better Life Index, 2021). Therefore, exploring the meaning of entrepreneurial leadership as a solely profit driven endeavour commands further research.

## 1.2 Rationale for the research

There is a paucity of research into the socially enabling entrepreneurial leader of SMEs (Pauceanu, 2021) and how this might influence socio-economic development of a nation, given SMEs represent 99.9% of the business population. The OECD recently claimed that SMEs contribute more than economic impact to an economy, arguing that they also exhibit social growth and contribute significantly to community prosperity and therefore enhance social cohesion (OECD, 2019). Despite this rising societal wellbeing emphasis, the positive impact of SME growth on community prosperity and wellbeing appears to be unrecognised in government reporting and economic policy (Gasparin et al., 2020). There has been significant research into social enterprises and the role of the social entrepreneurial leader in growth (Tian and Smith, 2014; Makeel et al. 2022), however research exploring commercial SME entrepreneurial leaders is somewhat limited (Pauceanu, 2021). Therefore, the research gap in exploring the intentions and subsequent behaviours entrepreneurial leadership beyond economic SME growth is apparent and has yet to be explored. Consequently, this research intends to explore and question whether SME entrepreneurial leaders generate both societal and economic growth, defined in this research as augmented SME growth. Augmented SME growth is put forth as being the shared outcomes of economic (commercial) and social growth in SMEs (see section 2.16 which explores this concept further). Kuckertz et al. (2023), Davidson et al. (2022) and Davidsson and Wiklund, (2013 p.56) suggest that “research studies focusing on the value generated in small business growth beyond amounts would prove to be more meaningful”. This has implications for modifying current SME growth policy incorporating a more holistic augmented growth perspective demonstrating perhaps the ‘real’ value SMEs contribute to economic and societal wellbeing.

This research aims to challenge and indeed expand the view that entrepreneurial leadership primarily enables economic SME growth by further exploring the social value generated by entrepreneurial leadership in commercial SMEs. The research makes an important contribution to a nuanced definition of entrepreneurial leadership. It also contributes to a new definition of SME growth, notably augmented SME growth. Augmented growth is defined as the shared outcomes of economic (commercial) and social growth in SMEs. From this definition an SME growth matrix emerges that

provides a platform for further research and is also a communication tool to inform government policy and support for augmented SME growth.

### 1.3 A case for augmented SME growth

The OECD (2019) defines 'green growth' as "aligning economic growth and environmental objectives". Separately, the OECD (2019) defines inclusive growth as "raising societies welfare or living standards broadly defined". It is a multidimensional measure of growth and includes both income-related measures and non-income elements such as societal prosperity and wellbeing. Amalgamating both OECD meanings, limited to the context of SMEs, this research proposes the concept of 'augmented SME growth' as a more holistic measure of SME growth by exploring whether entrepreneurial leaders are critical catalysts in generating economic and social growth outcomes.

To help provide a definition of 'augmented SME growth', we can draw on the Cambridge Dictionary definition of 'augmented' is 'to increase the size or value of something by adding to it' (Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations and Thesaurus, 2021 p.55). In terms of SME growth, increasing the value of economic growth by adding social growth is arguably 'more than' the original definition. The origins of SME growth performance currently sit within 'economic' terms as evidenced by government reporting (Invest NI Business Strategy 2017-21; ONS,2019) and academic literature (Ahmad et al., 2022; Harrison and Leitch, 2018; Ng and Kee, 2018). Within this research, augmented SME growth is defined as the shared outcomes of economic (commercial) and social growth in SMEs. It is a concept that defines entrepreneurial leaders as critical catalysts in generating commercial outputs whilst also contributing to community prosperity and well-being. Interestingly, in 2014, John Longworth (CBI) urged government,

"To focus on measures that will create an environment that promotes enterprise and boosts the confidence of small businesses, so they can continue to be the backbone of long-term economic growth and community prosperity"

(The Guardian, 2014 p.2).

It is well established in the literature (Harrison and Leitch, 2018; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Hermans et al., 2015) and government reports that economic SME growth is operationalised by the intentions and decisions of the entrepreneurial leader. However, there is limited research to evidence that entrepreneurial leadership also enables SME social growth, which also contributes significantly to a region's socio-economic development.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) literature supports the notion that SMEs do provide social and economic growth however, as the term implies, the focus tends to be on 'corporate' businesses. Since 'corporate' SMEs typically have over 10 employees and have the resource to measure CSR, arguably this is less applicable to smaller SMEs (0-9 employees) and may represent a 'hidden' value to a region's socio-economy (Graafland, 2003; Baker, 2003, Fenwick, 2022).

Currently, there is no empirical SME research to evidence that SME entrepreneurial leaders holistically enable 'augmented SME growth'. Hence this research intends to address this gap and explore whether entrepreneurial leadership generates augmented SME growth. Indeed, whilst entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs currently make decisions to 'economically enable' SME growth, their role in socially enabling decisions is what this research seeks to explore. Socially enabled decisions are informed by servant, ethical and authentic leadership approaches.

#### 1.4 Research question, aim and objectives

Set in this context, this research intends to explore the following research question: To what extent do SME entrepreneurial leaders generate both societal and economic growth, defined in this research as augmented SME growth. This leads to the overall aim of this study, which is to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

To accomplish the research aim and answer the research question, four research objectives were established:

1. To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth principally in social and economic terms.
2. To design a conceptual framework and attest the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth.
3. To explain the significance of augmented SME growth and subsequent implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory, policy, and practice.
4. To propose recommendations for future SME policy in this area.

Objective one examines the literature on the concepts of 'leadership' and 'entrepreneurship' that form the fundamental seminal theories for both these substantial disciplines. From this the literature review explores the evolution of leadership to 'entrepreneurial leadership' primarily pertaining to an economic perspective. The literature review also examines the development of a more 'socially enabled leadership' focus. Exploring empirically both aspects of economic and socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership represents the core contribution of the thesis and the generation of augmented growth in SMEs. Arguably such entrepreneurial leadership provides a refreshed understanding of purposeful SME growth.

The second objective explores the complex and interconnected relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth and highlights the central contribution of the thesis. Having reviewed the literature, the development of a conceptual framework was considered necessary to present the components of the research and how they are connected to the various variables of entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016).

The empirical outcomes confirmed a relationship between the independent variable (entrepreneurial leader) and the dependent variable (augmented SME growth). The empirical research therefore established the intentions, decisions, and subsequent actions of the socially enabling entrepreneurial leader in generating augmented SME growth. Entrepreneurial leadership research is known to enable economic SME growth. However, this empirical research goes further to uncover the socially enabling intentions of entrepreneurial leaders for SME growth. Consequently, the sufficiency of entrepreneurial leadership theory is questioned as it fails to recognise the enablement of SME social growth which 'augments' SME sales, profit, and job creation metrics.

The detailed literature review (chapter 2) and the emergence of a conceptual framework (objective one and two) informs the methodology (chapter 3), which empirically captures primary research data from a sample of Northern Ireland entrepreneurial leaders (chapters 4 and 5). The discussion (chapter 6) achieves objective three by building on the significance of augmented SME growth, answering the research question, and crystallising the implications of the research findings for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth theory, policy, and practice. Objective four emerged from the synthesis of the findings and recommends tangible and pragmatic research outcomes framing the research contribution (Chapter 7).

### 1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis has 7 chapters in addition to appendices and references. An overview of the chapters is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

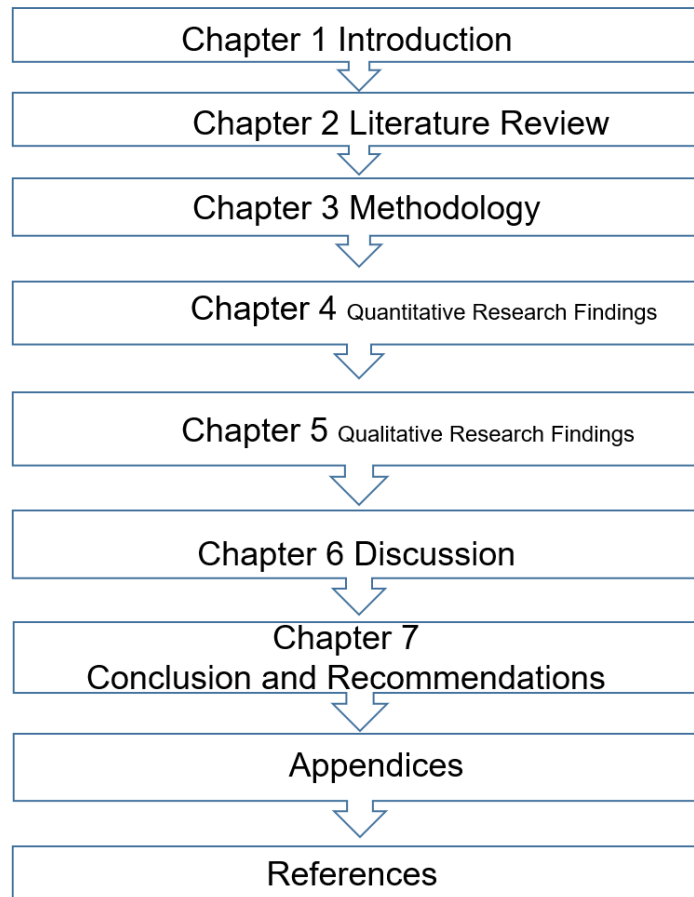


Figure 1.1 Thesis Structure

Chapter One outlines the background, rationale, and importance of the research study. It introduces the context and sets the scene to explore the research question, establish the aim, objectives, and research methodology to conduct the empirical research.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth principally in economic and social terms. It examines the evolution of leadership, particularly socially enabling leadership theory and entrepreneurship. The definitions and complex phenomena of SME growth are then explored in the context of Northern Ireland within the UK. Following this, literature on economic enabling entrepreneurial leadership is reviewed ending with a proposition to evidence the contribution of socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth. A conceptual framework emerges and is presented, framing the research approach to conduct empirical research, answer the research question, and establish the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology, research design and finishes with a detailed presentation of the data collection and analysis techniques for the research project.

Chapter Four reports on the analysis of the quantitative research findings.

Chapter Five reports on the analysis of the qualitative research findings.

Chapter Six provides a discussion of the findings presented from chapters four and five, triangulated with the findings from the literature review.

Chapter Seven is a summary of the key research findings and presents conclusions in relation to each of the four objectives.

## 1.6 Synopsis of Research Contributions

This research extends entrepreneurial leadership literature by evidencing that SME entrepreneurial leaders are socially enabling beyond commercial profit focused prosperity. It provides novel insights into the rising social conscience influencing entrepreneurial leader's decisions regarding SME growth. Through the introduction of the augmented SME growth concept and corresponding definition, it provides new knowledge on illuminating the shared outcomes of economic (commercial) and social growth generated by SME entrepreneurial leaders. Furthermore, the findings extend prior research on SME growth (Davidsson and Wiklund 2013; Pauceanu et al. 2022), resulting in a distinctive SME growth matrix. The SME growth matrix can be used by academics for further research, policy makers, SME entrepreneurial leaders and government start up support entities. The research also has implications for SME entrepreneurial leaders through professionally developing the entrepreneurial leader's understanding of the principles and practice of contributing to societal impact. Furthermore, the research has policy implications toward incentivising SME entrepreneurial leaders to report on their societal contribution to the local socio-economy and wider society.



## 1.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a background and rationale to the thesis and indicates the importance of this research to theory, policy and practice. The overall aim, research question and objectives were presented. The core questions which this research seeks to explore is whether entrepreneurial leaders generate both societal and economic growth outcomes, defined for this research as augmented SME growth. The research positions that entrepreneurial leadership theory is sufficient in economic terms but insufficient in social terms and argues that entrepreneurial leaders typically generate augmented SME growth. Arguably, augmented SME growth contributes more significantly to the economic and social fabric of local communities and wider society (OECD, 2019). The chapter finishes with an outline of the thesis structure and is presented in Figure 1.1. The next chapter will explore and review entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth literature which reveals a proposition for a nuanced, socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership that generates augmented SME growth.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are often recognised to be the backbone of every economy (Gebauer et al., 2023; Eggers, 2020). In 2019, UK SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises with 0-250 employees) account for 99.9% of the business population which is 5.9 million businesses (BEIS, 2020). In Northern Ireland there are 124,000 SMEs (ENI Barometer, 2021) which combined, represent 99.2% of SMEs in the region. Understandably therefore SMEs contribute significantly to economic development and are a meaningful foundation for academic research and policy design (Yu, 2001; Fuller-Love, 2006; Curran, 2000; Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Rao, 2021; Rojas-Córdova, 2022).

However, the Covid19 pandemic has raised unprecedented challenges and disruption for SMEs emphasising the criticality of entrepreneurial leadership decisions. Consequently, entrepreneurial leaders are compelled to make decisions within a plethora of unique contexts and complex variables that are arguably crucial to SME growth and survival. Hauser et al. (2020) argue that SME growth is typically determined by the decision-making behaviour of entrepreneurial leaders whose assumed primary purpose is annual profit maximisation as a measure of business growth (Hermans et al., 2015). Nevertheless, there are also entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs who have little desire to grow their business (Anderson and Ullah, 2014) yet enable profit in addition to implicit positive social value for wider community prosperity. Furthermore, some larger SME entrepreneurial leaders exhibit explicit Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities to demonstrate community integration within their business model. Indeed, there is increasing significance of social responsibility for the SME sector particularly in social and environmental impacts (Puiu and Wiśniewski, 2020). Arguably therefore, the entrepreneurial leader's influence on SME growth beyond economic metrics, suggests they also generate social growth. Gilman (2017) claims that aligning socially responsible activities to the competitive strategy of the business can enhance SME growth through more efficient use of limited resources and thus enhance their performance. Indeed, the rising concept of Industry 5.0 (Xu et

al., 2021) is showing a growing interest in core values of human-centricity, sustainability and resilience supported by recent government policy (Paris Agreement, 2015; SDGs 2015; The economy of Wellbeing, Llena-Nozal, 2019; OECD Better Life Index, 2021). Hence “economic and social growth can be mutually reinforcing” (Porter and Kramer 2006 p.92) supporting the view that SMEs provide social and economic growth thereby contributing to the health, well-being, and prosperity of their community.

This research intends to explore empirically whether entrepreneurial leadership generates both economic and social SME growth defined for this research as ‘augmented’ SME growth. Augmented SME growth is a concept that recognises the combined economic and social value generated by the decisions and subsequent action of entrepreneurial leaders in SMEs. The research will explore the contribution of a ‘socially enabling’ entrepreneurial leader who generates ‘augmented’ SME growth and challenges the current definition of entrepreneurial leadership.

To address the research question, aim and objectives, this chapter provides a critical review of the literature on entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth, culminating in the development of a conceptual framework. First it will outline the systematic literature review used to provide rigour, transparency, and a commitment to providing robust secondary evidence. Figure 2.1 outlines the structure of the chapter.

## 2.2 Research question and aim

This research intends to explore and question whether SME entrepreneurial leaders generate both societal and economic growth, defined in this research as augmented SME growth. This leads to the overall aim of this study, which is to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

### 2.3 Research objectives

Four objectives were established, to achieve the research aim:

1. To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth principally in social and economic terms.
2. To design a conceptual framework and attest the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth.
3. To explain the significance of augmented SME growth and subsequent implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory, policy, and practice.
4. To propose recommendations for future SME policy in this area.

### 2.4 Literature research strategy - a systematic literature review

To provide a robust review of prior literature, this research started off by undertaking a systematic literature review. Referring to the key words in the thesis title, the search keywords were leadership, entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth. The term augmented SME growth was not drawn from any prior research literature and therefore was not a 'key word' in the systematic literature review. The emergence of the term 'augmented SME growth' was unique and is a novel aspect to the thesis as it identifies a gap in the SME growth literature. This is discussed further in section 1.3.

Some scholars argue that the method of conducting a systematic literature review is considered to offer "the most reliable and comprehensive statement about what works" (Van der Knaap et al., 2008 p.49). However, recent contributions to the literature have called into question the framing of systematic reviews as a neutral, objective and comprehensive approach to evidence retrieval, grading and synthesis (Mallett et al.,

2012). At the core of these critiques is the concern that systematic reviews, if carried out in a rigid and non-reflexive manner, may generate partial and misleading statements about what works that are nevertheless seen to be authoritative and trustworthy.

The secondary research strategy for this research adopted a less rigid and more reflexive approach. The process outlined produces a review strategy that adheres to the core principles of systematic reviews including rigour, transparency and a commitment to taking questions of evidence seriously while allowing for a more flexible and user-friendly handling of retrieval and analysis methods. This approach is being progressively used by researchers (Walker et al., 2013) and is designed to absorb empirical evidence seriously, minimise retrieval bias and assure relevance to the research. This research aims to ensure a 'reflexive' systematic literature review that consists of three interconnected stages.

- Academic literature search (Step I)
- Snowballing (Step II)
- Grey literature capture (Step III)

#### 2.4.1 Academic literature search

The academic literature search obtained material from a broad range of sources and locations to capture as comprehensive a literature review as possible.

The identification of search terms is the most important part of planning a search for relevant literature (Bell and Waters, 2014, cited in Saunders et al., 2019 p.91). The key research terms used can be found on Table 3.5. As a result of variation across databases, (ABI/Inform, ASSIA, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, Elsevier Scopus, Science Direct, Emerald Management) it was decided that each key term would be searched twice: once with quotation marks used around key terms to search for explicit phrases exactly as typed and another without, to return as many relevant articles as possible. Truncation was also used for selecting key terms to provide optimal search results by widening the search to include various relevant word endings. Searches also took place using the Boolean logic and research 'strings' were created. This enabled combinations to limit and widen the variety of items using 'linked

terms'. Searching by author was also used to explore the literature and broaden the search to find other known researchers in the area. Table 2.1 below outlines the literature research strategy.

Index Key Research Terms	ABI/Inform Proquest	ASSIA Proquest	Business Source Complete EBSCO	Elsevier Scopus (Open Access)	Elsevier Science Direct (Open Access)	Emerald Managem't	Total Articles
Leadership	2128	21	81	46	498	10752	13536
Entrepreneurial Leadership	4671	151	104	2	7530	53460	65918
SME Business Growth	5394	16	14	191	5698	4202	15515

Table 2.1 Literature research strategy (Accessed - April 2019)

All searches were limited to peer-reviewed journals only, those in the English language and those with open access to the full article. To be included also were all business sectors and relevant papers were saved on to a secure networked server Mendeley. Mendeley beholds to house extensive literature required digitally for a research study. Each of the journal articles was allocated to relevant folders to enable efficient retrieval by the researcher.

#### 2.4.2 Snowballing (Backward)

Snowballing is a further retrieval mechanism and does not require the use of predetermined search strings. This process involves actively seeking advice on relevant publications in a particular field or on a particular topic from key experts – which will then be reviewed – and subsequently looking at the reference lists of those publications. Using the reference lists of these publications can uncover other relevant publications on the same research area and further reference lists from those references.

### 2.4.3 Grey literature capture

Grey literature capture is often located outside the orthodox peer review channels (that is, academic databases, journals) but can make a relevant contribution to the research (ref). These include working papers, concept notes, donor reports, policy documents and briefings. Using internet search engines such as Google, can unearth further relevant material. This can be particularly helpful for identifying studies and reports that have just been released and would not therefore be picked up through snowballing. Google Scholar was also used as a particularly effective way of identifying new or grey literature, and also features a useful 'cited by' function, indicating where relevant studies have been cited. More broadly, by incorporating Grey Literature into the retrieval mechanism, it is possible to move away from some of the rigidity associated with systematic reviews. Although often considered to be of lower quality than the peer-reviewed literature, a focus on grey literature will be used to increase the breath, relevance, topicality, and ultimate utility of the literature review in discussion.

Figure 2.1 below outlines the structure of the literature review. The literature review begins with examining the evolution of leadership extending to an analysis of seminal theories on socially enabling leadership, considering where perhaps key elements of augmented SME growth might be established in the decisions of the entrepreneurial leader. Thereafter the evolution of entrepreneurship and its convergence with leadership is discussed leading to current entrepreneurial leadership theory with regards to social entrepreneurial leadership.

There follows an investigation in the literature around the growing interest in social responsibility. The key current topics around entrepreneurial leadership's role in enabling social SME growth are also examined to include, CSR, Industry 5.0, Sustainable Development goals, Environmental and social governance (ESGs) and B Corporations. Finally, a review of the literature around and the widespread economic associations with SME growth are examined.

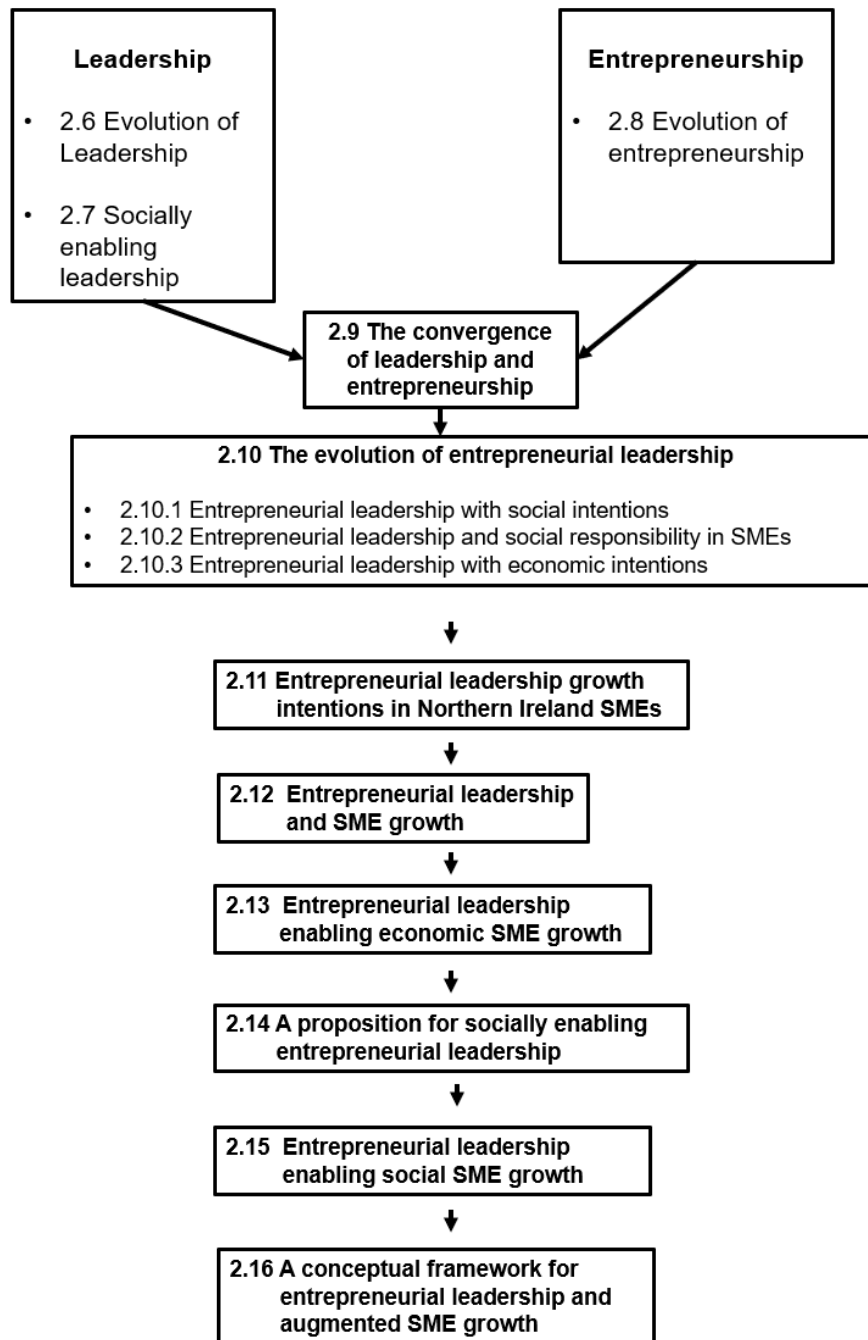


Figure 2.1 Structure of the literature review establishing knowledge in leadership and entrepreneurship

Arguably the study of entrepreneurial leadership is suitably studied in the context of SME growth (Leitch et al., 2013). Consequently, following section 2.9, the literature review investigates the concept of SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs (2.10) connecting to the associated relevant academic and grey literature.



Following this, in section 2.11 and 2.12 entrepreneurial leadership and the enablement of economic SME growth is examined ending with a proposition for evidencing socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership, 2.13. A discussion follows in section 2.14, on socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership in SMEs questioning the sufficiency of the current, economically intentioned theory of entrepreneurial leadership. In addition, the challenges of measuring social value growth in SMEs are examined, questioning the SMEs' contribution to positive social prosperity and wellbeing. Finally, a conceptual framework is presented, 2.15, framing the research approach to evidencing the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth.

## 2.6 The evolution of leadership

Figure 2.2 signposts the direction of the first stage literature review beginning with the evolution of leadership and follows on to a discussion on the leadership theories that seed the socially enabling behaviours potentially found in entrepreneurial leadership theory.

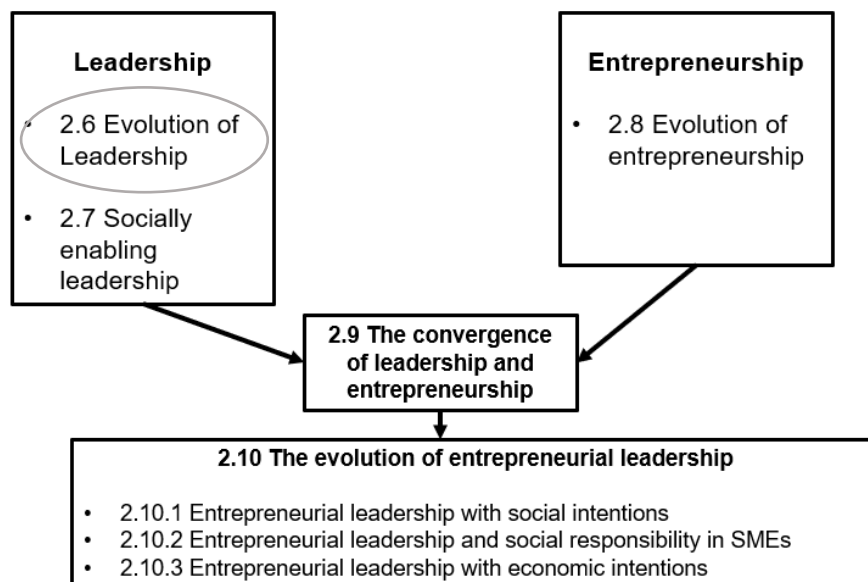


Figure 2.2 Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership

There is an absence of consensus on a definition of leadership in the literature as numerous theories have emerged over the years (Bass and Stogdill 1990; Burns, 2014; Northouse, 2018; Western 2013; Yukl and Chavez, 2002). Indeed Gill (2011) declares that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are leaders, hence a universal definition of leadership is yet to be discovered. For almost a century it has been a research topic of psychology and management and has led to numerous conceptual and empirical studies. Some scholars have argued that leadership is “curiously unformed and complex as an academic discipline” (Hackman and Wageman, 2007 p.43). Stogill (1974 p.259) argued that “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define the concept”. Bass and Bass (2009) also identified leadership as a complex subject and Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) said that it was a fruitless process to try and define leadership because of this complexity. It appears that as the economy adapts and changes so too does leadership thinking and therefore approaches.

Nevertheless, there have been various definitions of leadership using different phenomena that are selected or synthesised to accord the researcher’s perspective (Yukl, 2010). Indeed, definitions of leadership have been adapted by scholars to suit a particular research focus be that process or behavioural research. Table 2.1 illustrates where leadership has been considered as a process, meaning that leadership influences one or more individuals’ professional practice toward reaching a particular organisational goal. Thus, the process of leadership involves providing verbal direction to their followers in completing tasks to reach business growth objectives.

Author	Definition	Use
Stogdill (1950)	Leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement.	Process
Bennis (1959)	Leadership is the process by which an agent induces a	Process

	subordinate to behave in a desired manner.	
Smircich and Morgan (1982)	Leadership is realised in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of other. It involves a complicity or process of negotiation through which certain individuals implicitly or explicitly surrender their power to define the nature of their experience to others.	Process
Stogdill (1997)	Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement.	Process
Gardner (1990)	Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual induces a group to pursue objectives held.	Process
Northouse (2010)	Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.	Process
Yukl (2010)	Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective	Process

	efforts to accomplish shared objectives.	
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Table 2.1 Process leadership definitions. Source: Developed for this research

Alternatively, the behavioural leadership definition is more about the thinking, feeling and ultimately what influences the leader 'within' to behave as they do, in reaching preferred decisions that precede process before verbal communication to stakeholders. The behavioural definition is aligned to how the leader thinks in decision making and their subsequent 'action' to implement those decisions in generating SME growth.

The prowess of the human mind is of interest in leadership particularly in terms of how leaders process their thinking for leadership (Tskhay and Rule, 2018). Models of social cognition maintain that the leader's mind processes and integrates social information that helps to understand the world (McCrae and Quadflieg, 2010). Social cognition facilitates the leader's thinking in how to compete or make sound decisions. Accordingly, the mind not only extracts information based on current motivations but also learns associations that help to organise the social world more broadly (Tskhay and Rule, 2018). McCrae (2000) reveals that to understand human nature and the social world more accurately, social context methodologies are more valid than current research approaches.

Table 2.7 shows the evolution of selected leadership definitions where the leader's internal self-thinking is the source of their decision making and subsequent behaviour in leading employees to create value in a business. These definitions are more aligned to this research into understanding the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth.

Author	Definition	Use
Hemphill (1949)	The behaviour of an individual while he is involved in directing group activities.	Behaviour

Katz and Kahn (1978)	Leadership is the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organisation.	Behavioural process
Richards and Engle (1986)	Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished.	Behaviour
Barnard (1997)	Leadership refers to the quality of the behaviour of individuals guiding other people or their activities in organized efforts.	Behaviour

Table 2.2 Behavioural leadership definitions. Source: Developed for this research

Having reviewed the evolution of leadership it is useful to extend and focus the analysis further using the extant literature on socially enabling and ‘dual purpose’ leadership to position the leadership theories for enabling social growth.

## 2.7 Socially enabling leadership

Under the heading of leadership, section 2.6 examines the literature on socially enabling leadership as circled in Figure 2.2.

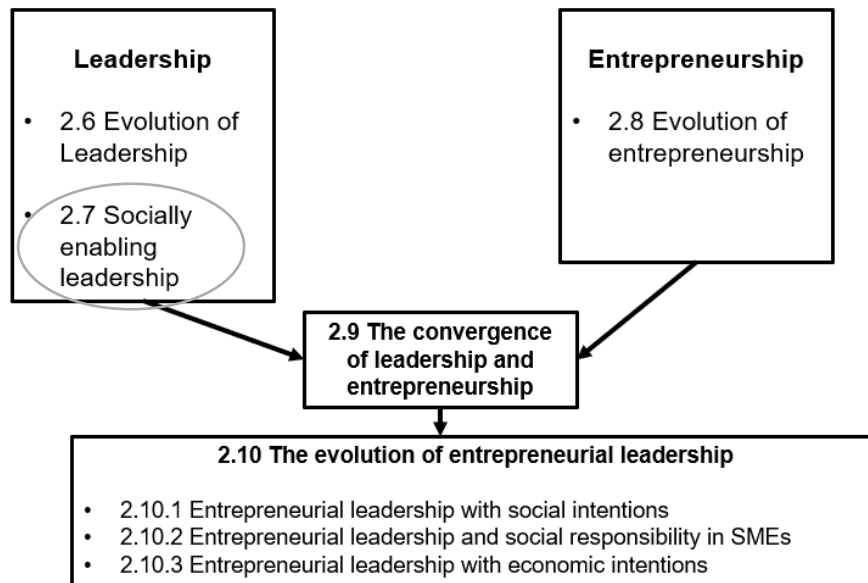


Figure 2.2 Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership

Whilst it is established that entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs are obligated to economic objectives as a priority, there are leadership theories that reflect the enabling of a 'dual' purpose entrepreneurial leadership for SME growth. For this research, servant, ethical and authentic leadership theories were examined as established socially enabling leadership theories. Arguably these theories are the foundations to entrepreneurial leadership intentions to enable SME social growth beyond the widely accepted pursuit of SME economic growth.

### 2.7.1 Servant leadership

Prior to servant leadership theory, contingency, process, and behavioural elements of leadership had centre stage (Hersey and Blanchard 1969; Fiedler 1967). Greenleaf (1977) introduced a moral lens to the theory of leadership known as Servant Leadership. Laub (2004 p.81) defines servant leadership as "an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader". The importance of 'the good of those led' is what distinguishes servant

leadership from other leadership models. Despite this, servant leadership was still largely marginalised for more popular leadership theory (Russell, 2016).

However, the outrageous corporate scandals of the late 1990's (Fombrun and Foss, 2004; Carson, 2003; Adler, 2002) and the exhibition of the Enron Corporation highlighted the importance of securing business performance augmented by a robust ethical approach. Consequently, servant leadership became more prominent, along with ethical leadership (Brown and Trevino, 2006) and authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2005). Reflectively, the vision of Greenleaf (1977) was that servant leadership is a compulsion to care for others and serve the common good in society. He argued that true leadership is about service and that great leaders are defined by the service they provide to individuals and society.

Whilst Greenleaf (1977) argued strongly that the moral side should be the central motivation of the servant leader he explicitly declared that effective action should not be compromised, and a dual model should prevail. Dierendonck (2011) and Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) conducted empirical research to evidence the economic and social enabling behaviours of servant leadership. As Sousa and Van Dierendonck (2017 p.13) assert "Servant leadership has been theorized as a model where the moral virtue of humility co-exists with action-driven behavior". The study they conducted evidenced that humility (moral side) could co-exist with enabling and empowering followers to succeed commercially (action side). Relying on a value system with dual values is what differentiates servant leadership from other leadership type theories (Russell, 2016).

A robust systematic review of the literature by McQuade et al. (2021) revealed the prominent themes in servant leadership to be values, behaviour, assessment, performance, and skills. Washington et al. (2006) and Russell (2016) align the necessary values of the servant leader to be empathy, integrity, and competence. Whilst the empirical studies of values are limited, behavioural studies of the servant leader identified four key determined behaviours that distinguished the servant leader. These were firstly enabling followers (Winston and Fields, 2015) and secondly, demonstrating stewardship (Beazley and Gemmil, 2010). Stewardship by the servant leader directs the business to connect and make a positive contribution to society. This is rooted on the value-ethics orientation and is demonstrated by the level of activities

that are integrated with community development and outreach programmes (Melchar, 2010). This pivots on the servant leader's natural cognition of the significance of developing a community cohesion within the workplace among followers who are inextricably engaged in contributing to external societal enterprises outside the business. Thirdly, spiritual support for followers' well-being (Sturm, 2006) and finally influencing followers (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Influencing followers is the ability to generate buy-in to support the servant leader's aspirations and organisational goals. Despite the research in behaviours there remains a limited amount of empirical research around the determined behaviours of servant leaders (McQuade, 2021).

The most expansive research in servant leadership is around the impact on follower performance and this is well evidenced in the literature through empirical research (Song et al., 2015; Jaramillo et al., 2015; Liden et al., 2015). There is also empirical evidence around the positive impact the servant leader can have on a follower's job satisfaction (Farrington and Lillah, 2018; McCann et al., 2014; McNeff and Irving, 2017). Moreover, there have been studies on the positive impact of servant leadership on follower well-being that enhances job satisfaction; work family commitment (Tang et al., 2016); life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2016); employee engagement (Carter and Baghurst, 2014) and commitment to the development of followers (Spears, 2010; VanDerdonck, 2010).

There is a lack of literature in the field about the skills of servant leaders and from the discussion thus far the research emphasis has been on behaviours, values, and characteristics. Nonetheless, empathy (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006) listening skills (Page and Wong, 2000), communication skills and trust (Russell and Stone, 2002) have been evidenced as valid skills in servant leadership. Another skill of the servant leader is altruistic and shows the level to which the leader would like to positively impact other people's lives with a giving nature. This leader serves the interests of others and has a generous spirit consistent with a philanthropic life purpose (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006). The servant leader also has high emotional intelligence and healing skills to support individuals who have suffered from trauma or hardship or anticipate consequences in an uncertain and dynamic workplace. They create a working environment where employees feel secure and can share professional and personal anxiety (McCann et al., 2014).



### 2.7.2 Ethical leadership

Another leadership theory that is associated with a 'dual purpose' approach to SME growth is ethical leadership that can influence the decisions of entrepreneurial leadership. There is a vast body of knowledge on ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005; Treviño et al., 2003; Treviño et al., 2000; Brown and Hartman, 2003) that has focused on what ethical leader's ought to do (Treviño and Brown, 2004 p.592).

There have been several scholars who have explored entrepreneurial leadership and associated ethical values (Darling et al., 2007 and Surie and Ashley, 2008). These studies uncovered that ethical values including hope, joy and charity are important in the entrepreneurial leadership of SMEs. Other aspects of behaviour of the entrepreneurial leader associated with ethical values include their capacity to be caring, responsible, trustworthy, honest, and fair (Sharif and Scandura, 2014). According to Brown et al. (2006 p.597) ethical leadership is defined as the "display of a leader's proactive explicit role modelling" to influence employee performance (Copeland, 2014) and builds reciprocal trust in a business (Eisenbeiss and Giessber, 2012). Ketut et al. (2015) declare that indicators of ethical behaviour are transparency, a focus on stakeholder interests, responsibility, compliance with legal responsibilities and loyalty. They go further to argue that the display of these values from the leader result in enhanced business performance.

Numerous studies have evidenced that ethical leadership generates positive outcomes in business performance (Khademfar and Amiri, 2013; Butt et al., 2016; Susmiato and Nurmayanti, 2018). This has also been claimed in the SME literature where the success of an SME is influenced by the entrepreneurial leader's ethical values (Harrison, 2018; Hartog and Belschak, 2012). Furthermore, recent research has identified that the long-term success of an SME business relies on the entrepreneurial leader's behaviour (Khademfar and Amiri, 2013; Butt et al., 2016; Chukwujioké and Akbin, 2018; Widayani, et al., 2020). Recent empirical research by Widayani, et al. (2020) found that when ethical behaviour is added to the dimensions of

an entrepreneurial leader in terms of risk taking, proactiveness and innovativeness, it can improve business performance in relation to profitability, the creation of social growth and long-term business sustainability (Metcalf and Benn, 2013; Amisano and Anthony, 2017; Tuhar 2017; Mamun et al., 2018; Aishah et al., 2020). Consequently, the SME entrepreneurial leadership style with an ethical approach can generate enhanced business growth for the greater good of the business and the employees therein (Mayer et al., 2012). A study by Sarmawa et al. (2020) evidenced the importance of employee trust (Yanik, 2018) and the ethical SME entrepreneurial leader to secure sustained business growth (Yu et al., 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Sarmawa et al. (2020 p.5) argues that “integrating ethical behavior with entrepreneurial leadership can significantly sustain and advance business performance”. Nevertheless, on a more cautious note Surie and Ashley (2008) claim that if ethical standards are followed in SMEs these can be a costly consideration, something that is also emphasised in the corporate social responsibility literature.

### 2.7.3 Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership is part of a suite of research around what is known as ‘positive scholarship’ alongside ethical, transformational, and other avant-garde and dual-purpose leadership theories (Hannah et al. 2014). Leadership theories such as servant and ethical leadership are also claimed to be moral approaches that attain a vast number of positive outcomes (Lemoine et al. 2019). Avolio and Gardner (2005) stated that authentic leadership is the ‘root’ of the positive categories of leadership studies whilst Alvesson and Enola (2019) referred to it as ‘fashionable’. Wilson (2013) differentiates between authentic and transformational leadership, the former being more inspirational and egalitarian, focusing on the leader themselves and the latter on the ability to ‘influence’ followers. Some noted that authentic leadership is simply the moral washing of transformational leadership (Alvesson and Enola, 2019). It is possible to view transformational and authentic leadership as very different (Wilson, 2013), with authentic leadership being much more modest and egalitarian, more inspirational than transformational, and focusing on the self of the leader more than on the direct influencing of followers.

Authentic leadership has challenges in definition by scholars as a primarily formative approach to leadership theory (Northouse, 2010; Caza and Jackson, 2011). The reason why it is of interest to this research thesis is that the theory has a focus on ethical values and integrity (Caza and Jackson, 2011) which are of interest regarding an entrepreneurial leader's dual role in SME growth. Many practitioners and scholars have taken an interest in authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010). However, currently there is no single definition on the attributes of an authentic leader because of difficulty in measuring the leader's values, self-awareness (George, 2003) and convictions (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). Indeed, the word authentic originates from the Latin *authenticus*, meaning genuine with no reference to moral or innately good. An attempt to define authentic leadership was proposed by Luthans and Avolio (2003 p.243),

“a process that draws on both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours on the part of the leaders and associates, fostering positive development”.

Harrison (2018) argues that authentic leadership theory proposed by many researchers lacks empirical underpinning evidence and continually attracts scrutiny from researchers in the leadership arena. Spoelstra (2018) indicates that whilst authentic leadership is popular as a leadership concept it is also problematic. Crawford et al. (2020 p.114) purports that criticisms of authentic leadership include “conceptual clarity; leader-centricity; bias towards the person, not the leader; philosophical ambiguity; and demographic challenges”. Hannah et al. (2014) goes further in their criticism and assert that researchers need to explore the contradictions in the ideology of authentic leadership. As Alvesson and Einola (2019 p.385) state “to lead authentically may be a subtle invitation not only to moral behavior, but also to narcissism and other pathologies” conceding that the essence of leadership is a means entirely for social influence.

This instability in a conceptual model challenges the understanding of authentic leadership in a bid to enhance leadership practice. Antonakis (2017) argued that authentic leadership as a construct is ambiguous, lacks clarity and theoretical robustness. Nonetheless, in the current challenging business environment, research

into positive styles of leadership (Crawford et al., 2017) are warranted for sustained socio-economic recovery. Interestingly a counter perspective on the influence of positive leadership styles came from Ladkin et al. (2010) who claimed that both negative and positive behaviour in addition to the conscious and unconscious elements of self-referential authenticity needs to be recognised in authentic leadership.

Therefore, the flaws of authentic leadership are centered on the dual perspective of the leader, either the implicit cognitive autonomous decisions (Bogren, 2006) to promote the leader's personal motivations or those decisions that influence behaviour around the well-being and advancement of their followers. Crawford et al. (2010) dismiss this contradiction and posit that the authentic leader will make balanced decisions that solve problems ethically and effectively. However, ethical decisions are sometimes not as immediately impactful on a business performance as unethical decisions. Mahoney and Thornes (2005) research showed that when leaders are making social and ethical decisions the longer-term outcomes are compelling and do steer their approach.

Some scholars of authentic leadership see the virtue associated as ends in itself (Wilson, 2014) in that the leader is the means to creating this desired end that is the flourishing individual human being. According to Newstead et al. (2018 p.148) "virtue is the human inclination to feel, think, and act in ways that express moral excellence and contribute to the common good". Therefore, it can be theorised that a leader's ethics are self-assessed from their character within and moralised by external assessments that form their contribution to the greater good (Crawford et al., 2020). This leads us to theorise that the process of enabling leadership must stem from a strong need to separate leaders from leadership and be mindful of the environmental and contextual factors that demonstrate how leadership is enacted (Ali, 2016).

Even though there are many lexical variations of what is meant by 'authentic' usually authenticity refers to that which is real, genuine, or true (Lehman et al., 2019). Crawford et al. (2020 p.125) define authentic leadership as a "process that influences and motivates followers to achieve goals through their sincerity and positive moral perspective, enabled through heightened awareness and balanced processing". Therefore, authentic leadership theory emphasises an enduring internal consistency

in a person's self and being an authentic leader means constantly striving to be oneself (Kernis, 2003). This emphasises four key behaviours in authentic leadership including self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing. Combining these promote "the positive ethical and psychological capability of followers" (Walumbwa et al., 2008 p.94). The following discussion will consider the factors and characteristics of authentic leadership to determine to what extent these factors may contribute to the decision-making role of an entrepreneurial leader in terms of socially and economically enabling SME growth.

Self-awareness in a leader is key to knowing an individual's true self. Walumbwa et al. (2008) proclaim self-awareness is an understanding of how an individual evaluates and makes sense of their world view and how these impact on their self-perception. This generates meaning of the world in relation to the individual (Gardner and Stough, 2002) and their personal self. However, Crawford et al. (2020) explain that this goes beyond self-awareness as authentic leaders also have a social awareness of others and their progress. Social awareness therefore is about an ability to assess the surroundings and the public and private social context within their world view and includes situational variance and environmental awareness (Govern and Marsch, 2001). It is important that a leader is enabled to be sufficiently aware of other's opinions within a social and organisational context and this focus is more on the role of the leader that responds to external expectations. This progresses the theory to incorporate two dimensions of self-awareness, that is the leader's own self-relevant understanding alongside social awareness which includes insight into other social actors and social groups within an organisational context. However, this presents a potential conflict within a business context whereby there have a differing identity and 'dual purpose' ideals (Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2014).

The authentic leader demonstrates the relational behaviour element of transparent, interpersonal sharing of feelings (sincerity) and information with others (Avoilio et al., 2009). Successful leadership is practiced most successfully by those individuals who can adapt and adjust their behaviour to situations and people around them. Authentic leadership displays a behaviour that shows accountability for more than just themselves (Gray et al., 2016; Sheehan et al., 2016). Arguably then, sincerity should be able to be objectively measured since the leader's true and honest behaviour, is therefore coherent with their actions and external messaging narrative.

Authenticity is harder to measure objectively as it is a continuous internal process “rarely understood” by the individuals themselves (Allvesson and Enola, 2019 p.383). Therefore, in contrast to sincerity, authenticity does not display any considerations of others and the authentic self exists entirely by the principles of their own “being” (Erickson, 1995 p.125). When leadership is operated within a collective (Avolio et al., 2009) relationships are about considering others and go beyond their self-interests. This conflict between the two behaviours is remedied in Crawford et al.’s. (2020) research where they propose that sincerity is an antecedent to authenticity within interpersonal relationships and has a stronger correlation between authentic leadership and organisational behaviour.

When processing information a leader’s worldview is not entirely rational, objective, and unbiased (Gardner et al., 2005) and therefore the capability to “objectively analyse all relevant data before coming to a decision” is known as balanced processing (Walumbwa et al., 2008 p.95). Unlike digital software, human beings, when evaluating information, are inherently biased and subjective (O’Neill and Liu, 2016). Therefore, when information is missing, leaders are likely to remain steadfast to their beliefs, principles, and values (Kernis and Goldman, 2006). Hsu et al. (2005) assert that rational decision making is affected by risk and ambiguity and therefore when given a choice, leaders make decisions based on their subjective experience (Rangel et al., 2008). Consequently, context is valid when theorising how authentic leaders make decisions as they cannot be completely objective and rational. Interestingly Crawford et al. (2020 p.123) claim from their research that leaders make decisions on “adding positive values to both themselves and their collective” mindful of their own values, bias, and subjectivity.

Avolio et al. (2009 p.424) explain that authentic leadership is “guided by internal moral standards which are used to self-regulate one’s behaviour” and decision making is not therefore influenced by external factors (Neider and Schriesheim, 2011). Crawford et al. (2020) pertain that authentic leadership comprises a deep understanding of the individual’s own moral framework yet goes beyond to incorporate the common good. Therefore, authentic leadership empowers followers as positive moral agents (Gardner et al., 2005) and therefore connects the leader’s ethical behaviour with a positive moral perspective and the social welfare and perspectives of their collective followers.

Consequently, authentic leadership suggests an ambiguous move for social good and practice with a strong moral compass. This however presents a challenge for the entrepreneurial leader of an SME with a competing interest in maximising profit, whilst also considering the interests of employees for their personal growth and well-being. Authentic leadership demonstrates an ability to process this conflict using a win-win approach to gain an optimum resolution for themselves and their collectives in a sincere and transparent manner (Agote et al., 2015). Crawford et al. (2020 p.124) affirm that authentic leadership displays a “positive moral perspective in the commitment to one’s intrinsic ethical framework, and a willingness to subdue personal interests and ego to facilitate collective interests”. Skrutkowski (2017) contends the moral front displayed by authentic leaders and highlights the different moralities in working life and business, suggesting that ethics are a relativistic notion. Some authors proclaim that moral is in the eyes of loyal followers (Hannah et al., 2014) with some who may engage in veiled altruistic activities by way of respecting the questionable motives of the leader for the primary good of business objectives.

Criticism of authentic leadership has been around the manipulation of followers (De Zilwa et al., 2014) however as an SME has less structural obstacles, the authentic leader has a more informal influencing approach (Crawford et al., 2020) that can also be applied because of the fluidity of the relationships with their collective followers (Crawford et al., 2020). Lemoine et al. (2019 p.149) assert that “authentic leaders make moral judgments freely and independently, without concern for potentially opposing normative or external social pressures”.

Gardner et al. (2011) purport that after all the corporate malfeasance like Enron (2001), Lehman Brothers (2008) and Tesla (2020), an antidote of genuine and value-based leadership is timely. Spoelstra et al. (2016) posit that there is an endless assortment of leadership theory and literature emerging that is never questioned. Furthermore, there is a compelling scepticism of authentic leadership and little knowledge around how the authentic entrepreneurial leader is expected to act, leading to claims of tautology, and could be said that the world is becoming increasingly fake with publicised moral failures in businesses, and this leads to disillusion and cynicism in the workplace for those leading the charge for the collective good of society Alvesson and Enola (2022). Hence, the dilemma of authentic leadership being the catch all positive leadership theory that informs best practice is perhaps naïve and can

work like Prozac (Collinson, 2012) for scholars keen to research feel good studies (Alvesson and Enola, 2019).

Despite the scholarly doubt over authentic leadership research, the frame of morality, sincerity, ethics, and integrity around being genuine or fake is worth consideration to inform professional leadership practice and relationships within the workplace and wider society in general. Leaders who can build and maintain relationships are critical in the current business climate, moreover they must also be entrepreneurial in the disruptive environment within which SMEs operate. Hence there is value in understanding servant, ethical and authentic leadership theory and the socially enabling implications this may have upon the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership theory.

Having examined socially enabling leadership (2.6) and viewing this leadership as a key factor in entrepreneurial leadership and the attainment of augmented SME growth, it is now pertinent to examine entrepreneurship and its evolution (2.7). Figure 2.2 maps Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership.

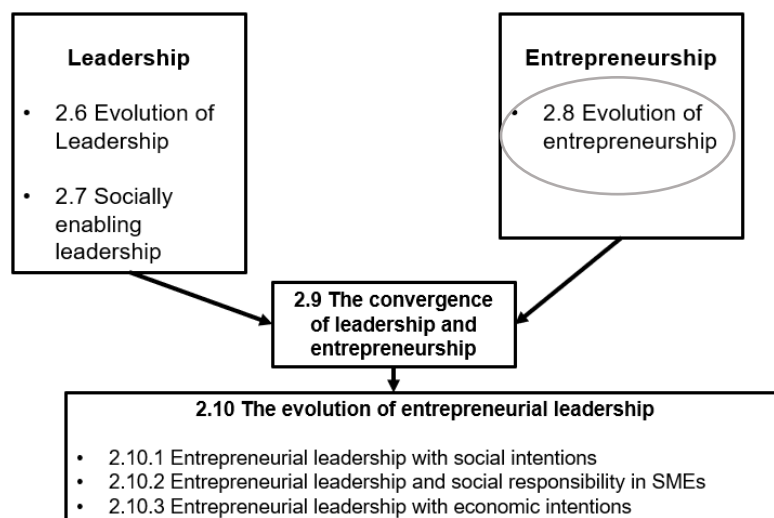


Figure 2.2 Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership

## 2.8 The evolution of entrepreneurship



To understand the source of entrepreneurial leadership it is valuable to explore the evolution of entrepreneurship and the implications this has for leadership of SMEs. Entrepreneurship as a concept is well documented in the literature and known to be complex, ambiguous, and diverse (Konhausner et al., 2021). The scholarly research around entrepreneurship has two main themes, firstly the lack of consensus in defining the concept and secondly whether entrepreneurship should continue to be studied as an independent concept (Galloway, 2015; Vecchio, 2003; Shane, 2012). Furthermore, Galloway (2015) maintains that the variety of definitions around entrepreneurship makes analysis of the concept problematic.

A critical review of the literature looks at the many approaches and lenses where entrepreneurial characteristics have been explored over the last number of decades. It is widely known that a definition of entrepreneurship is elusive and lacks consensus in the literature (Galloway et al., 2015; Shane, 2012; Harrison, 2018). Many scholars argue that for a concept to be useful in research it requires a definition. Consequently, researchers and scholars attempt to define concepts of entrepreneurship from their own perspective and research interests and these in turn fuel a lack of consensus in defining entrepreneurship. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) believe that entrepreneurship is defined as the relationship between profitable opportunities and the existence of entrepreneurial individuals.

Gardner (1990) completed research with academics, researchers and business leaders trying to understand the attributes of an entrepreneur and resulted in over 90 differing attributes. There is however a view amongst researchers that if a universal definition of entrepreneurship could be agreed the field would be united (Meyer et al., 2002). As Meyer et al. (2002 p.23) purport "Without an overarching definition...each researcher's interpretation of entrepreneurship guides the research question, sample, and level of analysis". This then limits the generalisability of findings and leads to inability to replicate studies.

Despite the fact there has been much debate about the definition of entrepreneurship as a basis on which to build knowledge (Shane 2012; Veccio, 2003) it is not reason enough to avoid researching the field or to accuse the research of being limited in value toward contributing to establishing theory. The complexity of entrepreneurship

is well known, and this also indicates that it is an area that requires deeper theoretical development. Table 2.3 illustrates the complexity of reaching a robust definition of entrepreneurship.

Author	Definition	Application focus
Schumpeter (1934)	Entrepreneurship is seen as the doing of new things, or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way. New combinations include (1) introduction of new goods, (2) a new method of production, (3) opening of a new market, (4) a new source of supply, (5) a new organisation.	Innovation
Casson (1982)	Entrepreneurship involves “taking judgemental decisions about the coordination of scarce resources”.	Behavioural process
Shane and Venkataraman (2000)	Entrepreneurship is “the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited.”	Opportunity identification and exploitation
Bruyat and Julien (2001)	Entrepreneurship is the “process of creating new value” (an innovation and/ or a new organisation).	New venture creation and innovation
Eckhardt and Shane (2003)	Entrepreneurship can be defined “as the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of future goods and services”.	Opportunity identification and exploitation
Kuratko and Hodgetts (2007)	“Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion toward the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions.”	New venture creation and innovation
Stokes et al., (2010)	“Entrepreneurship is the emergent process of recognising and communicating creativity such that the	Innovation

	resulting economic value can be appropriated by those involved.”	
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Table 2.3 A selection of entrepreneurship definitions (Adapted from Harrison, 2019)

There have been several advocates over the decades who use the economic perspective to reveal the entrepreneur as an agent of enterprise that can impact significantly on the economic system, including Knight (1921); Schumpeter (1961); Kirzner (1982) and Loasby (1983). Knight's (1921) theory of uncertainty argued that the entrepreneur is different to a manager as they are a calculated risk taker and the characteristics possessed by an entrepreneur are knowledge, foresight, superior manager ability and confidence in their judgement.

Research also revealed the importance of entrepreneurs for the growth of new businesses (Meyer et al., 2002). Schumpeter (1961), on the key role of the entrepreneur in economic development, claims that an entrepreneur is a force of dynamic change in the economy. Adam Smith (1723-1790) was the first British scholar and economist to take an interest in the concept of the entrepreneur. In 1776, his work on 'an enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations', was most concerned about the motives and conditions for the creation of wealth and the main motive he identified was self-interest, within the context of choice, competition, and free trade. Bentham (1787), inspired by Adam Smith's work, argued that entrepreneurs do not follow routine, they find new markets, discover new resources, enhance existing products, and lower production costs. Bentham saw entrepreneurs as special individuals whilst Smith saw an entrepreneur as a common man. Schumpeter (1961) argued that the entrepreneur was a catalyst for change and economic development but did identify the need to have leadership ability to assure profit. Birch's (1987) research also showed that in the USA small businesses were mostly responsible for job creation. Nevertheless, Schumpeter in his theory only accounts for financial risk and does not consider softer outcomes like reputation and leadership abilities of the entrepreneur.

This analysis so far illustrates entrepreneurship as a choice of action, the commitment to resources and the system that is devised to pursue it. Entrepreneurial behaviour is normally entwined in the concept of entrepreneurship and the behavioural perspective is more focused on what entrepreneurs do (behaviour) rather than who they are (trait characteristics). Gartner (1989) similarly declared the emphasis should be on the dance (what they do) rather than the ‘dancer’ (descriptive traits). Achievement of the most desired imagined future for the entrepreneur will depend on their experience, personality, ambitions, aspirations, and knowledge (Chell, 2008) and the ultimate synthesis of these factors was described by Shackle (1979) as enterprise. The importance of the entrepreneur’s contribution to the economy through enterprise typically associates the entrepreneur with a drive for sales and profit (Hermans et al., 2015). Casson (2000) advocates that the entrepreneur must be proficient in decision making, foresight, self-knowledge, and a skilful communicator, indeed all these characteristics are securely and equally aligned to leadership. Arguably leaders and entrepreneurship are inextricably linked and therefore to appraise their evolution and convergence is pertinent.

Figure 2.2 signposts the next section of the literature review on the convergence of the concepts of leadership and entrepreneurship (2.8) followed by a review of relevant scholar research in defining entrepreneurial leadership.

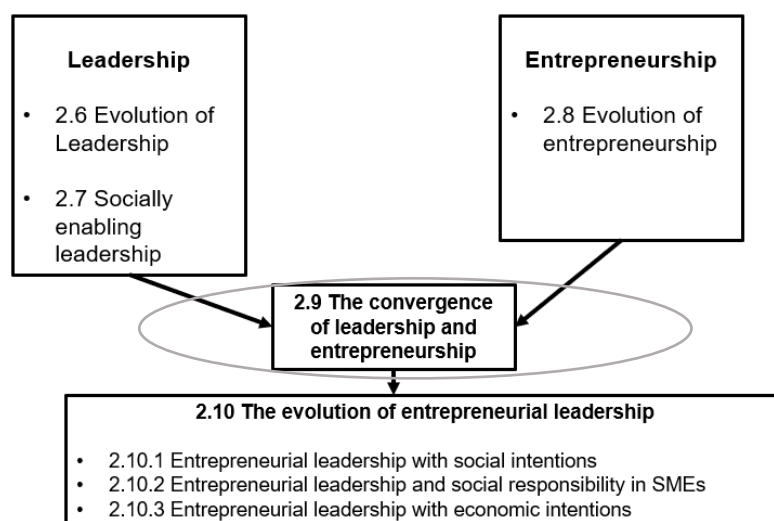


Figure 2.2 Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of

entrepreneurial leadership

## 2.9 The convergence of leadership and entrepreneurship

Yukl (2012) introduces entrepreneurship into the leadership literature and acknowledges leaders must be entrepreneurial in the current dynamic and disruptive environment where SMEs exist. There is a considerable body of research in the fields of entrepreneurship and leadership spanning several decades. Despite such work across both domains, entrepreneurship and leadership remain relatively ambiguous concepts. There are considerable overlaps and parallels between entrepreneurship and leadership, both historically and conceptually (Cogliser and Brigham, 2004; Galloway et al., 2015), with some researchers defining entrepreneurship as leadership within a narrow context (Vecchio, 2003). This research has led to the emergence of a new paradigm known as “Entrepreneurial leadership” (Cogliser and Brigham, 2004; Fernald et al., 2005; Kuratko, 2007; Pauceanu et al., 2021).

It is often presented that an entrepreneur must naturally be a leader. This is sourced in the belief that the entrepreneur defines their vision and attracts individuals and stakeholders to believe and follow the vision to achieve profitable business success (Harrison, 2017). It follows that in the current disruptive and ever-changing business environment, individuals leading entrepreneurial ventures need to understand and practice effective leadership (Fernald et al., 2005). Roomi and Harrison (2011) argue that entrepreneurial leadership is yet to be defined. Both Gutpa et al. (2004) and Renko et al. (2015) collectively argue that there is still no agreement on how it can be evaluated toward a deeper understanding. Fernald et al. (2005) however, carried out a meta-analysis of 136 academic research papers in leadership and entrepreneurship to find agreement on the common characteristics of an entrepreneur and a leader. They identified eight common characteristics of successful leaders and entrepreneurs to be visionary, creative, flexible, persistent, patient, have risk propensity, achievement orientation and motivation. However, Harrison and Roomi (2011) assert that these characteristics are descriptive and do not provide any clear explanation, analysis, or guidance on how they can be utilised to deepen the understanding of the concept.

Yukl (2012) acknowledged that leaders in a disruptive and changing environment must be entrepreneurial. Consequently, there is an emergence of creative, adaptable, and flexible leadership approaches for a new, ever challenging economy. Furthermore, entrepreneurship has widened to include the building of social capital (Colfax et al, 2009) and social innovation. This subsequently shows that the capabilities that blend the leader and entrepreneur (Hutchinson, 2017) are increasingly common in leadership behaviour (Harrison and Leitch 2018; Leitch, et al., 2009).

It is notable that different authors highlight different aspects of 'entrepreneurship' and 'leadership' and therefore a lack of definition persists as the qualities of either concept differ in everyday language (He, et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). The entrepreneur is typically known to oversee a business, exploit opportunity, innovates, and grows an established business. In addition to this they work through uncertainty, risk and challenge and go the extra mile persistently (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990; Stevenson and Gumpert, 1985; Alvarez et al., 2013; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Iversen et al., 2008). Indeed 'entrepreneur' as a word is sourced from the word 'enterprising' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). On the contrary the 'leader' has followers that they guide using social and interpersonal means (Yukl et al., 2018; Burns, 1978). Therefore, an entrepreneur has core competencies to start a new enterprise and a leader has competencies to influence followers.

## 2.10 The evolution of entrepreneurial leadership

There is a considerable body of research in the fields of entrepreneurship and leadership spanning several decades however both concepts remain ambiguous (Yang et al., 2019). Leitch and Volery (2017 p.149) argue "the confused state of the field can be attributed primarily to the sheer volume of publications, the disparity of approaches, confusing terms, many trivial studies, and the preference for simplistic explanations". It is clear however that there are overlaps and parallels between entrepreneurship and leadership, both historically and conceptually (Cogliser and Brigham, 2004; Galloway et al., 2015).

The concept of entrepreneurial leadership emerged in the early 1990's (Gartner

et al 1992; Harrison and Leitch 1994) and was generally associated with the growth of SME's. Harrison (2018) created a timeline of leadership approaches in Figure 2.3, showing how leadership approaches have developed over time and suggests entrepreneurial leadership remains an emerging area of research.

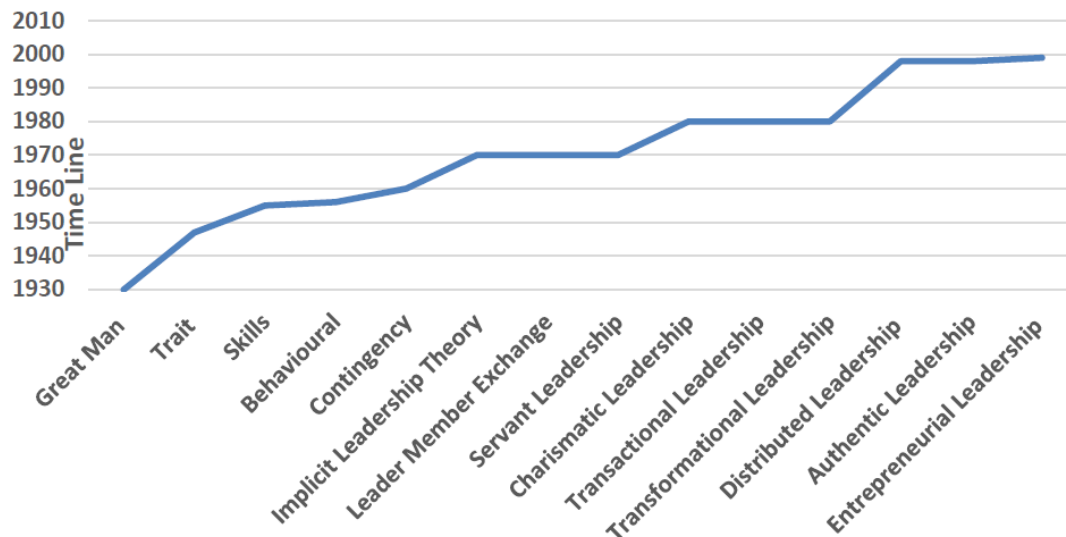


Figure 2.3 The evolving leadership approaches (Harrison, 2018)

Dinah et al. (2014) and Harrison (2018) argue that entrepreneurial leadership is one of the less well researched models of leadership. Consequently, there is an absence of clarity in definition and research tools are deficient in evaluating its behaviour and characteristics (Harrison et al., 2015, Leitch et al., 2013). Recent research has highlighted that there is an abundance of meanings connected to the concept of entrepreneurial leadership demonstrating the complexity in reaching a clear definition (Dean and Ford, 2017). Therefore, further research in defining entrepreneurial leadership would be useful to understand the associated outcomes for SME growth. Research indicates that the domain of the entrepreneurial leader bridges the behaviours of the entrepreneur and the leader (Cogliser and Brigham 2004; International Council for Small Business (ICSB) 2015; Renko et al., 2015; Tarabishy et al., 2005). It focuses on the individual leader and the measurable value they generate in relation to growth of an SME (McClelland 1961; Renko et al., 2015; Skodvin and Andrese, 2006). Some views have indicated that entrepreneurial

leadership is about human empowerment (Vecchio 2003), however Leitch and Volery (2017) pertain entrepreneurial leadership is best described in relation to SME growth.

Since the late 1990's, scholars have endeavoured to find a definition of entrepreneurial leadership. The ability to create opportunity was the focus of the early 1990's (Cunningham and Lischeron, 1991). Later Ireland et al. (2003), suggested that it was the ability to influence others. Some scholars emphasised a talent to inspire, by visualising alternative future scenarios (Gupta et al., 2004) and the ability to have focus, vision and passion, presented another research lens (Thornberry 2006).

More recently the debate around entrepreneurial leadership has progressed from seeking to compound the two separate disciplines (Vecchio, 2003) to the acceptance that entrepreneurial leadership cannot be separated and is more valuable to be understood as more than the sum of the parts (Leitch et al. 2013; Kuratko 2007; Roomi and Harrison, 2011). Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2013) propose that it is concerned with generative innovation in multidimensional and complex circumstances. Recently the emphasis has focused on the collaborative behaviours of entrepreneurial leadership and its position in energising communities of practice that co-create and collaborate beyond the organisational boundaries (Renko et al. 2015; Sklaveniti 2017; Romano et al. 2017). Table 2.4 identifies an outline of the pathway entrepreneurial leadership theory has journeyed and the disciplines that have adopted and disseminated its value through research and publication in academic journals.

YEAR	TITLE	AUTHOR	JOURNAL/BOOK NAME
2003	Entrepreneurship and leadership: Common trends and common threads	Vecchio, R.P.	Human Resource Management Review
2004	Entrepreneurial leadership: Developing and measuring a cross cultural construct.	Gupta, V., McMillan, I., Surie, G.	Journal of Business Venturing
2007	Entrepreneurship and leadership	Antonakis, J., Autio E	The Psychology of Entrepreneurship
	Entrepreneurial leadership and new ventures: Creativity in entrepreneurial teams	Chen, M.H.	Creativity and Innovation Management
	Entrepreneurial leadership in the 21st century	Kuratko, D.F.	Journal of Leadership and Organisational Studies



<b>2008</b>	Practicing authentic leadership	Avolio, B.I., Wernsing, T.S.	Positive Psychology: Exploring the Best in People
<b>2010</b>	Learning to lead in the entrepreneurial context	Kempster, S., Cope, J.	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research
<b>2011</b>	Exploring distributed leadership in the small business context	Cope, J., Kempster, S., Parry, K.	International Journal of Management Reviews
	Entrepreneurial leadership: What is it and how should it be taught?	Roomi, M.A., Harrison, P.	International Review of Entrepreneurship
<b>2012</b>	Effective leadership behaviour: What we know and what questions need more attention	Yukl, G.	Academy of Management Perspectives
	Cheerleader, Opportunity Seeker, And Master Strategist: ARL Directors As Entrepreneurial Leaders	Carpenter, M., Taesil, H.	College and Research Libraries
<b>2013</b>	The development of entrepreneurial leadership: The role of human, social and institutional capital.	Leitch, C.M., McMullan, C., Harrison, R.T.	British Journal of Management
<b>2014</b>	Entrepreneurial Leadership And Performance In Chinese New Ventures: A Moderated Mediation Model Of Exploratory Innovation, Exploitative Innovation and Environmental Dynamism	Huang, S., Ding, D., Chen, Z.	Creativity and Innovation Management
	From Hero Innovators To Distributed Heroism	Meijer, A. J.	Public Management Review
<b>2015</b>	Understanding and measuring entrepreneurial leadership style.	Renko M, et al	Journal of Small Business Management
	Breaking glass: Towards a gendered analysis of entrepreneurial leadership.	Harrison, R.T., Leitch, C.M., McAdam, M.	
	Towards Operationalizing Complexity Leadership: How Generative, Administrative And Community-Building Leadership Practices Enact Organizational Outcomes	Hazy, J., Uhl-Bien, M.	Leadership
<b>2017</b>	Discourses of entrepreneurial leadership: Exposing myths and exploring new approaches	Dean, H., Ford J.	International Small Business Journal
	Processes of entrepreneurial leadership: Co- acting creativity and direction in the emergence of new SME ventures,	Sklaveniti, C.	

	Entrepreneurial leadership: Insights and directions	Leitch, C. M., Volery, T.	
	Nascent Entrepreneurship and Territorial Social Capital: Empirical Evidence from Italy	Romano, M., Nicotra, M., Schillaci, C	Technology – Based Nascent Entrepreneurship
<b>2018</b>	Skills based analysis of entrepreneurial leadership	Harrison et al.,	Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development
<b>2019</b>	Advancing Entrepreneurial Leadership as a Practice in MSME Management and Development	Simba, A and Thai, M.	Journal of Small Business Management

Table 2.4 Outline pathway for the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership. Source: Developed for this research

Renko et al. (2015 p.58) have identified entrepreneurial leadership as “influencing and directing the performance of group members toward achieving those organisational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities”. The process influences the entrepreneurial leader not only to recognise but also exploit innovative opportunities in the marketplace that capture a benefit or economic return to the business (Renko et al., 2015). Isenberg (2011) argued that entrepreneurial leaders can motivate others to engage in fundamental strategic change.

Many scholars have struggled with the fusion of leadership and entrepreneurship as a concept of leadership and are not comfortable with the merging of these two concepts. According to Leitch and Volery (2017 p.148) “the research base in entrepreneurial leadership has grown significantly since the early 1990s”. Kuratko (2007 p.8) claims that “entrepreneurial leadership is becoming a global necessity and the more we can understand the elements that comprise this concept, the more we can advance it”. Whilst a definition of entrepreneurial leadership remains elusive with variation in the discourse, the phenomenon is therefore neither indisputable or definite and arguably is only meaningful depending on the concept and approach from which it derives. Indeed,

Table 2.5 adapted from Harrison (2015) and Renko et al. (2015) illustrates the evolution of definitions of entrepreneurial leadership in the table below.

<b>Scholars</b>	<b>Definition of entrepreneurial leadership</b>
Cunningham and Lischeron (1991)	Entrepreneurial leadership involves setting clear goals, creating opportunities, empowering people, preserving organisational intimacy and developing a human resource system.
Nicholson (1998)	Entrepreneurial leaders can differ from other leaders and non-leaders in specific respects including traits such as high risk-taking behaviour, openness, need for achievement and low deliberation. Entrepreneurial leadership is also about being resistant to the socialisation that shapes managerial personality and the willingness to escape management into leadership.
Ireland et al. (2003)	Entrepreneurial leadership is the ability to influence others and, to manage resources strategically in order to emphasise both opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behaviours.
Cogliser and Brigham (2004)	Entrepreneurial leadership should involve idea generation, idea structuring and idea promotion, where idea generation is critical in the early stages of a venture and idea structuring and promotion in the latter stages. Therefore, an entrepreneurial leader does not only need to recognise opportunities, but he or she must also be able to marshal the resources necessary to reach the potential of that opportunity.
Gupta et al. (2004)	Entrepreneurial leadership creates visionary scenarios that are used to assemble and mobilise a supporting cast of participants who become committed to the discovery and exploitation of strategic value creation.

Kuratko (2007)	Entrepreneurial leadership is a unique concept combining the identification of opportunities, risk taking beyond security and being resolute enough to follow through.
Surie and Ashley (2008)	Leadership capable of sustaining innovation and adaptation in high-velocity and uncertain environments.
Leitch et al. (2013)	Entrepreneurial leadership is the leadership role performed in entrepreneurial ventures, rather than in the more general sense of an entrepreneurial style of leadership.
Renko (2015)	Entrepreneurial leadership entails influencing and directing the performance of group members towards the achievement of organisational goals that involve recognising and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities.
Fontana and Musa (2013, 2017)	Entrepreneurial leadership is about influencing others toward a goal through effective communication to recognise opportunity and share a vision about future possibilities that organisations could exploit to sustain competitiveness.
Simba and Thai (2019)	Entrepreneurial leadership involves conceiving a new business model idea, setting a vision, building a team, executing the business model to create, deliver, and capture value while adapting to change.

Table 2.5 Definitions of entrepreneurial leadership Source: Adapted from Harrison (2015) and Renko et al. (2015).

It could be argued that entrepreneurial leadership is found at the juncture between the entrepreneurial leader and the tasked activities of a team of employees, a position of thinking, influencing and then exploiting the opportunity. In the literature Renko (2015) summarises how entrepreneurial leadership research has been built on two pillars, firstly the opportunity focused activities and attitudes of the leader as an individual or secondly the process of influence to motivate teams of people. Renko (2018) then argues that research in entrepreneurial leadership has been limited by the wide variety of perspectives that leaders adopt when thinking about the topic. The thinking for this

research is influenced by the individual intentions of the entrepreneurial leader to focus on activities, providing opportunity through people, for positively pursuing economic and social growth. However, recently entrepreneurial leadership has been argued in the context of large companies using the term corporate entrepreneurship. Scrutiny around this has been evidenced where corporate entrepreneurial leadership decisions are known to ‘mis-diagnose’ situations that will “on average, fail to achieve desired ends” (Hunt et al., 2023 p.19). It is argued that the primary reason for this is the environmental factors the corporation is working within coupled by large complex organisational structures where decision making can be slow to impact on growth. Therefore, for the purposes of exploring the research question for this thesis the focus on entrepreneurial leadership of small business growth is more relevant and this is supported by Leitch and Volery (2017) who pertain entrepreneurial leadership is best described in relation to SME growth and purport the necessity to consider the cognitive, social impact and relationships developed in leading SMEs and measuring their contribution to an economy. Therefore, the term SME owner managers are best placed to be aligned to entrepreneurial leadership and the independent variable in relation to the exploratory focus of the thesis.

Having examined thus far in section 2.9 the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership, it is relevant for this research to examine the literature on the concept of entrepreneurial leadership with social intentions (2.9.1), evidenced through socially responsible activities (2.9.2) as well as the widely accepted research on the economic intentions of entrepreneurial leadership.

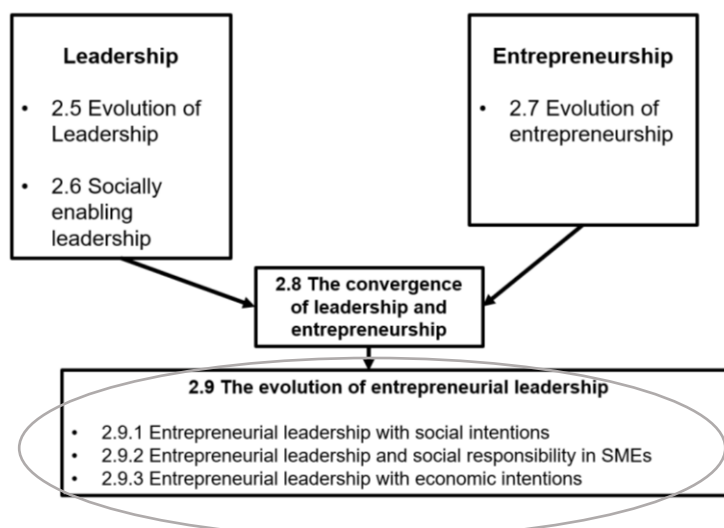


Figure 2.2 Structure of first stage literature review leading to the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership

### 2.10.1 Entrepreneurial leadership with social intentions

Recently there has been interest by scholars in the merging of the social entrepreneur and leadership since there are many correlations between these concepts in creating positive social and economic change (Hynes, 2009; Jones and Crompton, 2009).

Kuratko (2007) addressed the role of entrepreneurial leadership primarily as economic leadership, operating entirely within the paradigm of western capitalist economies. However, Smith et al. (2011) developed a theory about leaders in social enterprises and how they can develop skills that oversee competing financial and social and economic missions of organisations. Rae (2017, p.79) proposes a definition of social entrepreneurial leadership as “a social and connected practice, involving trust, shared values and reciprocity”. It appears that the social entrepreneurial leader’s key priority is attaining a social difference where generating income is critical but there is no pursuit of profit. This income enables social innovation to sustain community economic development and well-being. A study by McKeever et al. (2012 p.12) showed that “social entrepreneurial leadership seemed to share an understanding of latent value, and how to transform it into an appropriate form for harvesting benefit for the local community”. The social entrepreneurial leader flourishes as they endeavour to build community trust around their social enterprise and gain engagement within their communities. This type of entrepreneurial leader is not in a power relationship and instead demonstrates ease in co-creation and relationship building and understands the bigger socio-economic benefits by engaging in broader community development. McKeever et al. (2012 p.13) confirms “if entrepreneurs are embedded in and committed to the welfare of their communities, then the developments which emerge are more likely to be in a form which is co-created by the community and the entrepreneur”. However, it is arguable that an entrepreneur in a social enterprise will naturally struggle with their behaviours around the paradox of mission in generating income and equally in providing impactful positive community outcomes.

Tian and Smith (2014) emphasise the skills required by the social entrepreneurial leader to overcome the mission paradox. Firstly, they refer to the social entrepreneurial

leader reneging to acceptance to minimise conflict, continually finding ways to lower anxiety and mindful of relationships when seeking alternatives. Smith et al. (2012) endorse these skills but also add a growth mindset whilst embracing the views of others. Furthermore, Lewis (2000) refers to an ability to think creatively and being mindful of stakeholders, needs to develop alternative activities that foster impactful socio-economic community development. Secondly Tian and Smith (2014) refer to the ability to differentiate mindfully between different community needs and demands and show empathy in scoping out remedies beneficial to both stakeholders. Finally, building on differentiation is the ability to be sensitive in decision making to uphold competing stakeholder demands embedded in the socio-economic mission paradox. Scholars also investigated the factors that led to leadership success in UK social enterprises and proposed a theory that the social entrepreneurial leader display ways of being, self-awareness, courage and strong values around caring for others and influencing positive community change (Rae, 2017; Greenleaf, 1977; sharif and Scandura, 2014). These characteristics are the keystone for building community strength and wellbeing that incorporates strong social development in a local community.

The integrity, capability and decision-making skills of the social entrepreneurial leader form the basis of the concept of social construction by creating knowledge through various interactions and contexts (Fletcher, 2003). The view of social cognitive theory (SCT) is that individuals, through reciprocal and simultaneous interaction, influence change (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Social entrepreneurial leadership is naturally reflexive and is demonstrated through the generation of creative social innovation projects to achieve their social mission. Anderson et al. (2006) reveal from their research that social entrepreneurial leadership creates innovative ideas that highlight opportunity to ignite the self-determination pursuant on desirable socio-economic goals. This is one of the key skills of social entrepreneurial leadership (Hynes, 2009) and provides deeper understanding of the socially enabling intentions of the commercial entrepreneurial leader in pursuing social SME growth. Evidencing a commercial SMEs social growth, and subsequent socially enabling intentions of the entrepreneurial leader, are the outcomes of activities known as social responsibility.

### 2.10.2 Entrepreneurial leadership and social responsibility in SMEs

Bolton (1971) argues that SMEs typically lack formal management structures, so owner manager decisions reflect their approach to social responsibility. In an SME the entrepreneurial leader's value, drive and implement social responsibilities using managerial discretion (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004). This socially responsible activity demonstrates their personal values and shape the SME culture aligned to their own beliefs and values (Puiu and Wiśniewski, 2020). Graafland et al. (2003) claim that the practical implementation of a business ethos requires employees and managers to actively work to the norms and values of a business. This locates the responsibility to the entrepreneurial leader of aligning the vision and values of the business to any socially responsible activities.

The entrepreneurial leader has a critical role to play in managing stakeholder expectations in socially responsible activities. Stakeholder theory accepts that all businesses have stakeholders, large or small and that managing these sensitively may improve business social responsibility (European Commission and Observatory of European SMEs, 2002). Nevertheless, stakeholder theory tends to centre on the 'corporation' or large company so regarding SMEs the relationships with stakeholders are considerably different (Jenkins, 2004). Stakeholders in smaller SMEs are less formal, more trusting, and combined with personal engagement share reciprocal intuition. Witt (1998) argues that there is both an entrepreneurial and cognitive element in the theory of business growth, where the entrepreneurial leader influences shared concepts and ideas and forges new links with the community and wider society. This creates a recursive exchange between wider society and the entrepreneur with "trust and understanding being a socially derived outcome" (Chell, 2008 p.73) and is an impactful outcome for growing SMEs of the future. However, large businesses are more likely to have more strategically planned formal stakeholder management compared to SMEs who develop deeper relationships where they can co-innovate social growth and impact in real time.

Stakeholder management in SME social responsibility activities is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. However, research shows that the main gateways for the socio-economic outcomes of entrepreneurial leadership are found in strategy and



processes (Hitt and Ireland, 2005, Kraus and Schwarz, 2007) and rationalised thinking (Sklaventi, 2017). This concurs with Frieling (2007) who identified these as key constructs of entrepreneurship implicit in the study of SMEs. Therefore, when researching entrepreneurial leadership that enables social and economic SME growth, a more holistic approach to strategy and process is most impactful in achieving positive economic and social outcomes (Mathews, 2017).

Further to this Leitch and Volery (2017) purport the necessity to consider the cognitive, social impact and relationships developed in leading SMEs and measuring their contribution to an economy. Other scholars have argued that entrepreneurial leaders are the inspiration across a wide range of circumstances in large organisations and civic society (Levie et al., 2014). Entrepreneurial leadership is therefore well positioned as a concept to critically understand SMEs and their augmented growth (Harrison and Leitch 2018; Leitch, McMullan, and Harrison 2013; Ng and Kee 2018; Renko et al., 2015). Consequently, having explored entrepreneurial leadership social intentions and subsequent positive SME outcomes, arguably the pursuit of economic growth, through sales and profit remain the primary intentions of the commercial entrepreneurial leader.

### 2.10.3 Defining entrepreneurial leadership with economic intentions

The economic perspective reveals the entrepreneurial leader as an agent of enterprise that can impact significantly on the economic system (Knight, 1921; Schumpeter, 1961; Kirzner, 1982; Loasby, 1983; Storey, 1994; Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Hermans et al. 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Davidsson et al., 2002; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2003; Thongyai and Potipiroon, 2022). Scholars suggest that the entrepreneurial leaders of growing SMEs are defined by growth of sales, job creation and assets. The implications of this are aligned to Cassars (2007) claim that entrepreneurial behaviour is driven extrinsically for wealth attainment at a micro and macro level and is an important determinant in entrepreneurial leadership.

This evidences not only the significance of the entrepreneurial leader's role in the economy but also about their thinking and feeling skills to make decisions in conditions

of uncertainty. Enterprise is a choice of action, the commitment to resources and the system that is devised to pursue business growth. Gibbs (2000 p.13) argued that in exploiting opportunity in uncertainty, based on resources available, the entrepreneurial leader's behaviour is based on "ways of doing, feeling, communicating and learning things". Simba and Thai (2019) explain that this is beyond the concentrations of a new venture creation or the entrepreneur's activity (Schumpeter, 1934) and brings into focus small business growth (Bridge, 2017; Bridge and O'Neill, 2018; Harrison and Leitch, 2018).

This understanding presents a view that both leadership and entrepreneurial skills are critical to the growth of small businesses (Bridge 2017; Fernald et al., 2005; Kuratko, 2018; Kuratko and Morris 2013; Siddiqui and Jan 2017). The emphasis on skills makes it unavoidable to link the entrepreneur and the leader as an individual who can contribute uniquely to innovation and creativity in the workplace whether they are self-employed or employed. Breslin (2011) argues that the entrepreneur's behavioural and cognitive processes are also naturally intertwined with leader behaviours that exist in growing SMEs. Therefore, the concept of entrepreneurial leadership aligns logically within the domain of SME growth as this is necessary for business vitality and survival (Karol, 2015).

Interestingly, there have been many different disciplines that have attempted to define the entrepreneurial leader including management, economics, sociology, and psychology (Nielsen et al., 2017). This research so far accepts the literature which defines entrepreneurial leaders' intentions to exploit opportunity, create enterprise and maximise profit. Therefore, the proposed definition for this thesis is an individual with a desired vision and a catalyst for generating sustained economic outputs drawn from several authors definitions pertaining to this (Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Hermans et al., 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Hauser et al., 2020). This suggested definition steers the concept toward entrepreneurial behaviour capability in business organisations (Carsrud, et al., 2018) where the intensity of entrepreneurial drive for financial growth in uncertain markets is the measure of success (Siddiqui and Jan, 2017). Within this definition, the entrepreneurial leader's behaviour from an enterprise lens is primarily focused on generating financial profit and shareholder value. This lays the foundations

of questioning the singular focus of most entrepreneurial leadership definitions as the driver of economic output and profit maximisation in the context of SMEs.

Having analysed the literature on the various growth intentions in entrepreneurial leadership (2.9) it is important to contextualise this within Northern Ireland, to establish a broad understanding of participant entrepreneurial leaders and their intentions for SME growth (2.10). This stage of the literature review is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 2.4.

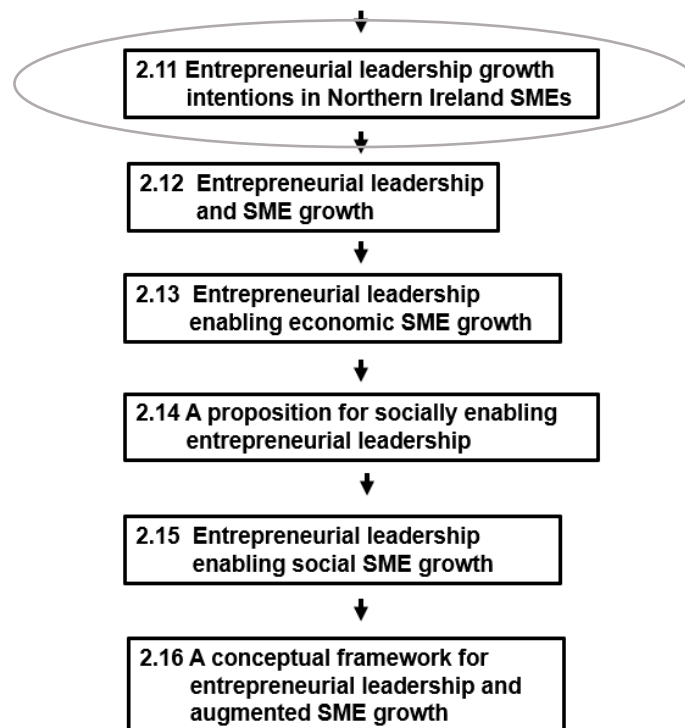


Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

### 2.11 Entrepreneurial leadership growth intentions in Northern Ireland SMEs

According to the Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) there are just over 76,000 (61%) businesses registered in Northern Ireland. This does not include those that are self-employed and are not registered for VAT or PAYE (one-person businesses). Accounting for the BEIS (2019) measurement of 124,000 private sector

businesses in NI, then circa 48,000 (39%) businesses are unregistered SMEs (one person businesses) with a turnover of less than £85K (VAT registration threshold).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) involves 49 economies and is a world-wide project providing information on the entrepreneurial landscape. It is the world's most accurate study in comparing entrepreneurial activity between nations. The underpinning thinking behind GEM is that entrepreneurship is critical to economic prosperity and drives job creation, competitiveness, and economic growth.

The GEM report evidences that levels of entrepreneurial activity are a vital sign of any economy as the generation of new ventures is positively associated with economic growth, productivity, and job creation. In 2018 the Department for the Economy sponsored the Northern Ireland component of the GEM UK research project as it helps to better understand entrepreneurship and the importance of it for overall economic prosperity particularly in innovation driven economies like Northern Ireland. In the survey they measure a new entrepreneur to be in a business under 3.5 trading years and an established business to be over 3.5 trading years. The individual attributes of entrepreneurial leaders used to measure in the survey are age, gender and motivation and determined by opportunity, necessity, or choice. This is where on necessity there are no alternatives to employment and the other is where opportunity is exploited by the choice to be entrepreneurial and start-up an SME. The impact that is measured is on business growth, innovation, and internationalisation. It is important to note that the Total Entrepreneur Activity (TEA) does not measure all entrepreneurial activity in a region and businesses as entities regarding growth. Instead, it measures the characteristics of individuals and the types of businesses they establish. Figure 2.5 compares the total early entrepreneurial activity between the UK and Northern Ireland up to 2018.

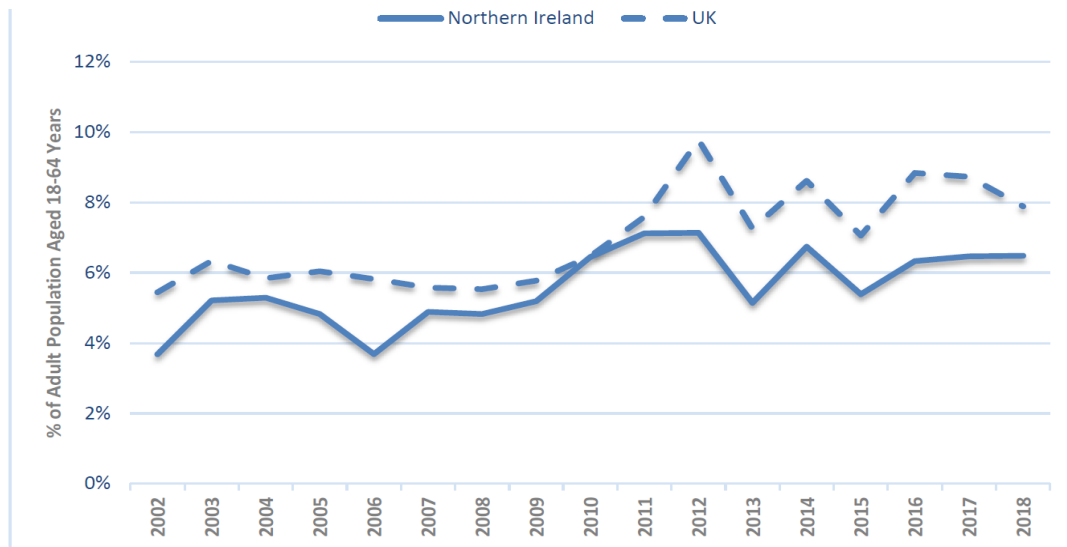


Figure 2.5 Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity in Northern Ireland and the UK 2002-2018. Source: GEM APS 2002-2018

The (2018) GEM report indicates that Northern Ireland was behind the UK with regards to start-up activity and the formation of new business at an individual level, however overall, there is a growth trend for entrepreneurial activity in Northern Ireland up to March 2018. Therefore, Northern Ireland has a sound bedrock of established entrepreneurial leaders that are surviving in their businesses who are more than one year old.

In Northern Ireland, Figure 2.6 shows that across council areas the NI GEM (2018) reported that there was little difference in Total Entrepreneurial Activity across council areas however this can be unreliable due to the size of sample. Nevertheless, this shows an even spread of entrepreneurial activity across the region of Northern Ireland.

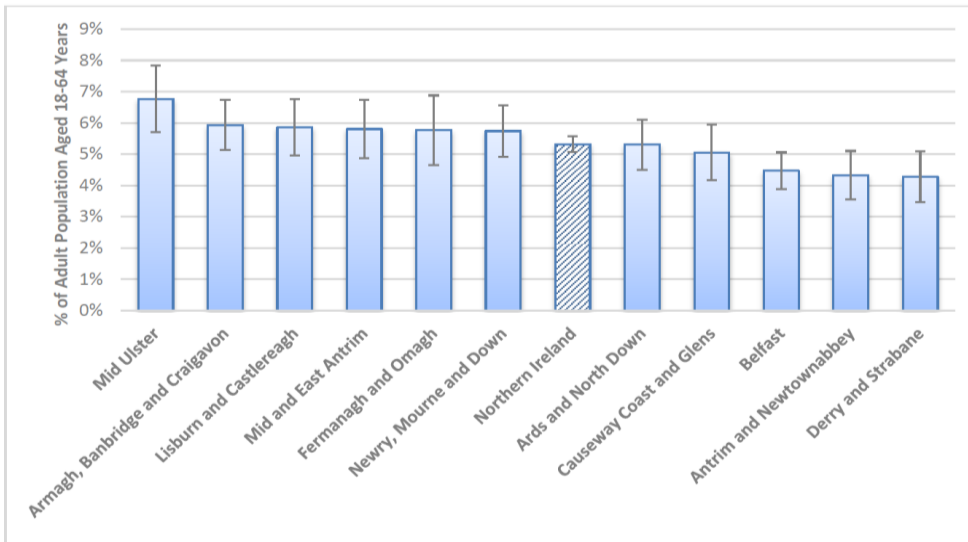


Figure 2.6 Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity in Northern Ireland in 2003-2018 by Council Area, with 95% confidence intervals. Source: GEM APS 2003-2018.

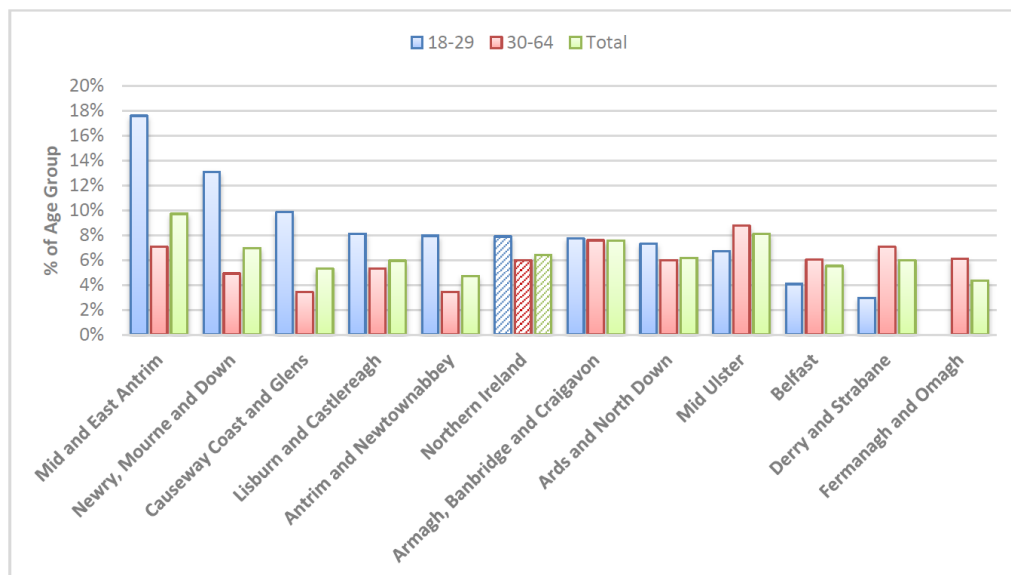


Figure 2.7 Total early-stage entrepreneurship by age and council area (2016-18). Source: GEM APS 2003-2018.

Regarding age group in Figure 2.7 above showing entrepreneurial activity in Northern Ireland across council areas, the highest TEA rates are typically found in Mid and East Antrim, however overall, there is a spread of entrepreneurial activity across the whole region.

Figure 2.8 shows the frequency of high employment growth expectation in Northern Ireland for early entrepreneurial start-up businesses and established businesses in comparison to the UK average.

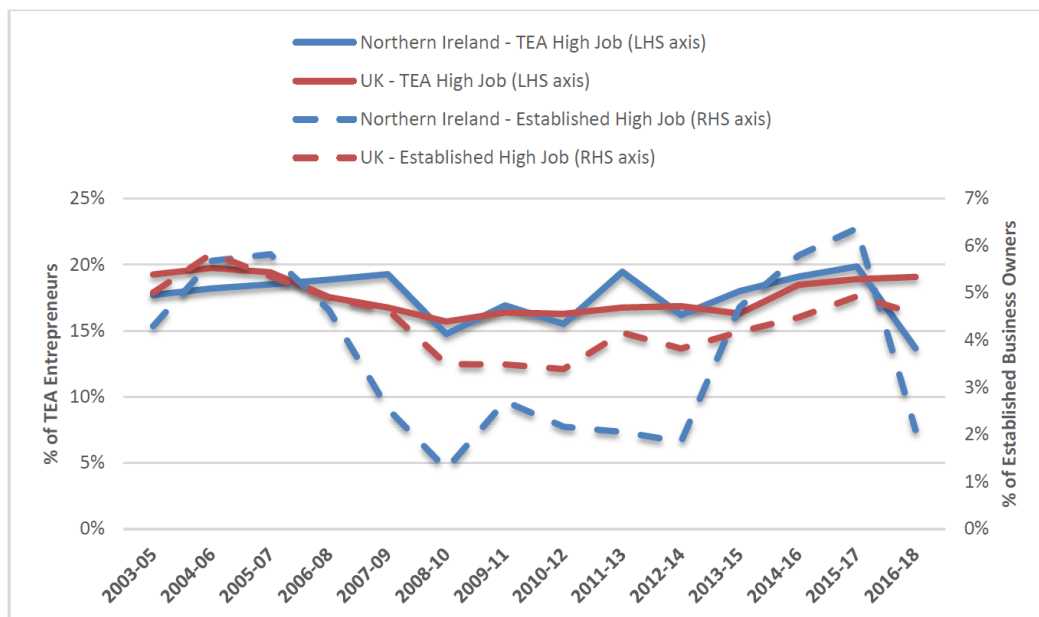


Figure 2.8 Growth expectation by employment. Source: GEM APS 2003-2018.

This shows another measurement using jobs as a reflection of SME growth. It also shows that in established businesses the prospect of job growth drops in the established firms more severely than the new start-up firms. This arguably means that

the more established entrepreneurs are less intent in growing through job creation compared to new start entrepreneurs regarding expected growth.

Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) is a representation of a population category of 18-64 who have either just started their own business or are entrepreneurs who have been operating their business for more than 12 months but less than 42 months. Figure 2.9 shows the measure of entrepreneurial leader activity in the population for the different regions in Northern Ireland.

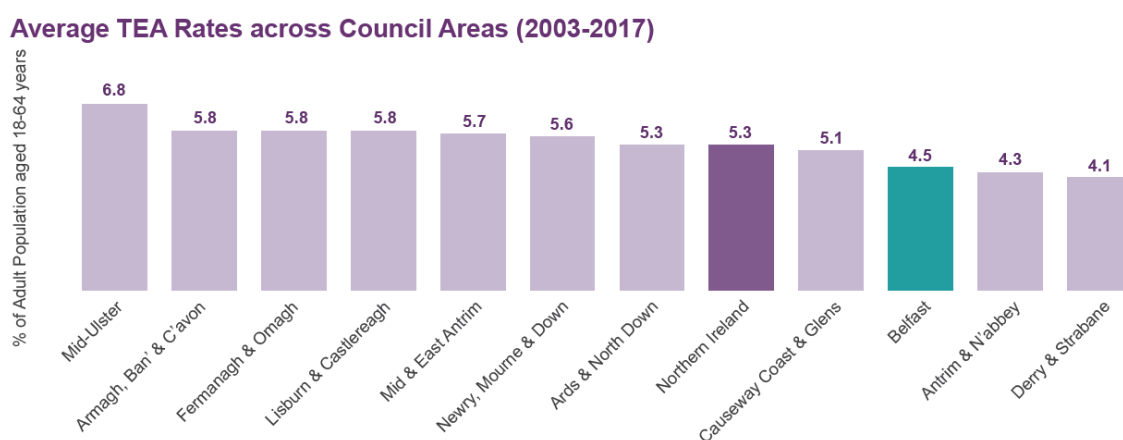


Figure 2.9 Measure of entrepreneurial leader activity in the population for the different regions in Northern Ireland. Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2018 (UK) Enterprise Research Centre.

In 2018, the Enterprise Research Centre (ERC) released a report on micro businesses in Northern Ireland (1-9 employees) and provided the first evidence on levels of business ambition, resilience, and digital adoption for Northern Ireland businesses. The research was built on that of Herman et al. (2015) where the owner-managers growth intention was linked to the performance and growth of a small business. The ERC research however showed that 77% of NI micro business owners see it as 'important' or 'very important' to keep their business a similar size as it is today. A further 18% of all respondents aim to build a national and international business. In between these two extremes the research indicated that 38% of all micro business owners in Northern Ireland aim to grow their business profitably to reach a stage that they can exit or at least keep the status quo.



Northern Ireland's profile of ambition in SMEs is broadly similar to the UK (ERC, 2018) however lags by 4% behind the UK in the ambition to grow a national/international business. In addition, Northern Ireland is one of the highest regions who consider 'keeping the business as it is now' a priority with only marginal growth. Figure 2.10 positions NI in contrast to other nations regarding indicators of business SME growth ambition (ERC, 2018).

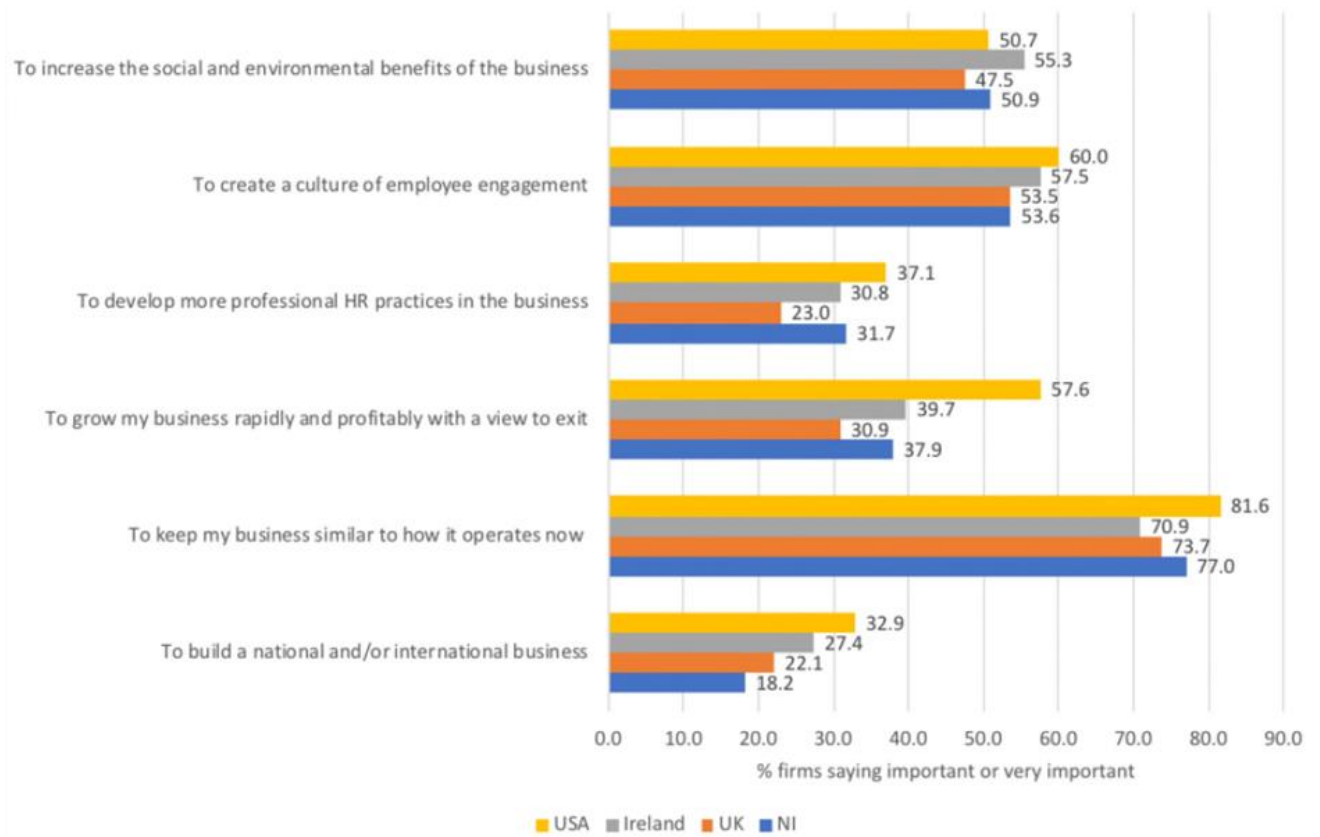


Figure 2.10 Indicators of Business Ambition. Source: Enterprise Research Centre 2018

Figure 2.10 also shows that the main motivation of microbusinesses in Northern Ireland regardless of size or ownership is to sustain existing growth levels and only 1 in 5 businesses would choose to grow internationally.

The indicators of personal ambition within the USA, Ireland, UK and Northern Ireland, as illustrated in figure 2.11 are consistent with much of the scholarly research on entrepreneurial leadership that emphasises personal freedom and flexibility (Weber et al.,2015). This may underpin the notion that financial as well as the non-financial benefits are significant in entrepreneurial leadership. The ERC's research noted that while the financial aspect of running a business proves important only 37% of entrepreneurial leaders in Northern Ireland (USA 63%) believe it is important to 'build great wealth and grow'. Interestingly, 83% of leaders of micro businesses indicate that building a business to sustain personal and family life is important.

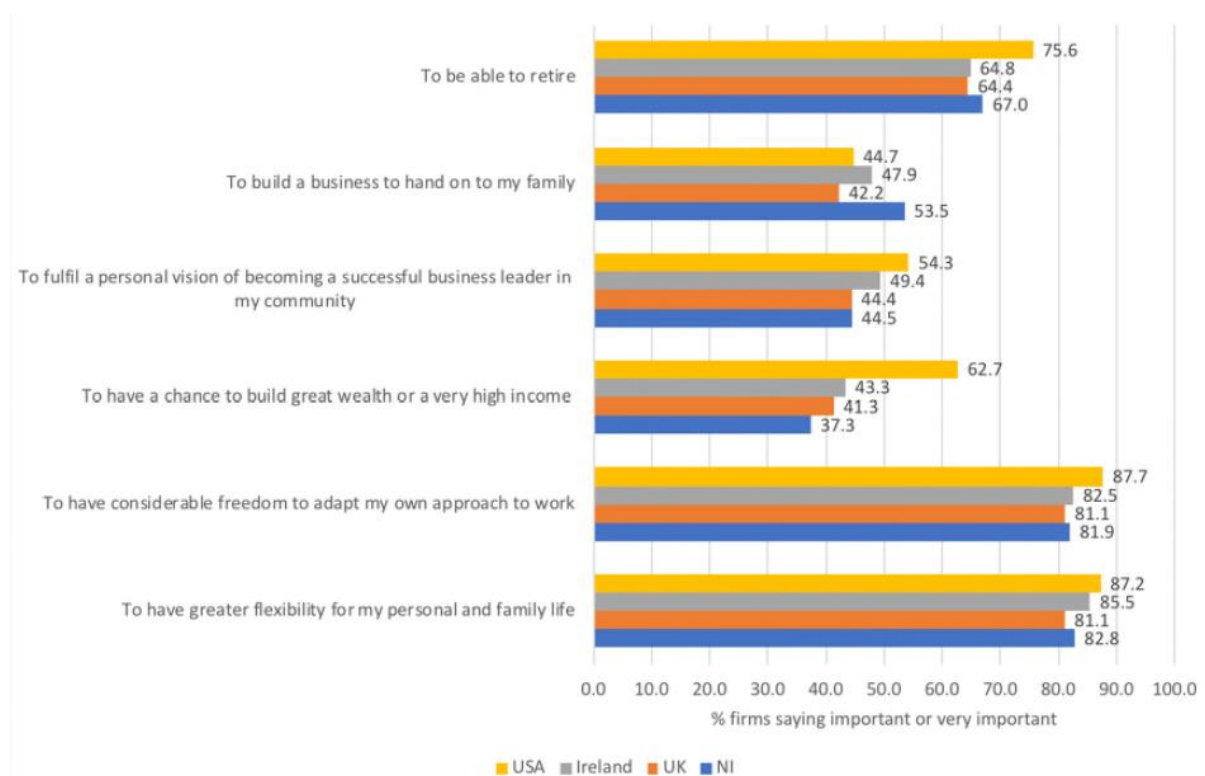


Figure 2.11 Indicators of Personal Ambition Source: Enterprise Research Centre (UK) 2018

The ERC (2018) report tabulated in Table 2.6 highlights what appears to be performance gaps in growth of Northern Ireland SME's, based on the normal definition of business growth in economic output terms. Interestingly the table below shows that almost half of SMEs in NI perceive the importance of enhancing the social and environmental benefits. This supports the view that SMEs in Northern Ireland are influenced by successful growth indicators beyond the economic output metrics.

	No. of employees		Ownership	
	1-4	5-9	Family	Non-family
To build a national and/or international business	17.5	20.7	16.8	18.4
To keep my business similar to how it operates now	77.8	73.9	79.1	76.4
To grow my business rapidly and profitably with a view to exit	37.8	38.2	38.8	37.8
To develop more professional HR practices in the business	29.3	40.0	35.2	30.7
To create a culture of employee engagement	50.6	64.2	57.3	52.5
To increase the social and environmental benefits of the business	49.1	57.3	53.5	50.2

Table 2.6 Business ambition in Northern Ireland: by size band and ownership  
Source: ERC (2018)

When measuring the ambition of the entrepreneurial leader in Northern Ireland it is notable from ERC (2018) research that there are two main areas: the personal ambition of the entrepreneurial leader and the impact this has on growth ambitions of the business.

It is of course recognised that financial growth is critical and such surveys of entrepreneurial leaders are naturally interested in economic gains. It is credible that the ERC (2018) research attempts to measure the entrepreneurial leader's ambition through gaining social and environmental benefits, however the analysis and interpretation of these factors are limited in the research report. The ERC research

indicates some lack of financial growth ambition in Northern Ireland micro businesses compared to other regions in the UK and beyond. A more in-depth interpretation of these results may expose the criteria that identify the entrepreneurial leader with other purposes beyond economic output informing their decision making for SME growth. Therefore, the case for 'augmented growth' is proposed as a more credible indicator of SMEs' combined economic and social growth. The term 'augmented' growth refers to the augmentation of economic growth and is inclusive of social growth as a measure of SME growth. Entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs could therefore gain recognition or funding for their contribution to economic and social growth in a region. Moreover, researching the entrepreneurial leader who generates augmented growth challenges the literature whereby entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs are defined by their role in maximising profit. Critically, to understand further the entrepreneurial leader's intentions to enable SME growth, an analysis of the literature into potential relationships between these two concepts would be beneficial. Figure 2.4 guides the next stage of the literature review which is to examine entrepreneurial leadership and the relationship with SME growth (2.11). Firstly, the definition of SMEs is established (2.11.1), followed by a discussion on the measurement of SME growth and the challenge this presents for empirical research (2.11.2). A contextualisation of SME growth in relation to the UK (2.11.3) and Northern Ireland (2.11.4) is then presented to establish the research location.

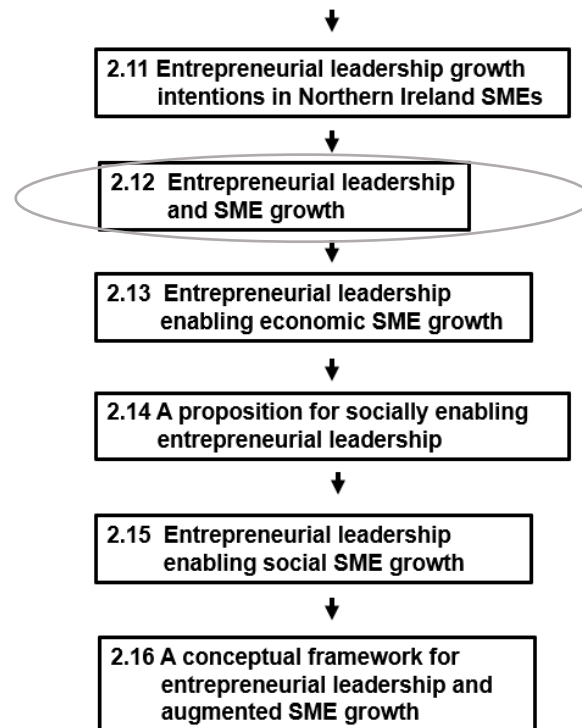


Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

## 2.12 Entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

Entrepreneurial leadership is well positioned as a concept to develop an understanding of SMEs and their growth (Harrison and Leitch 2018; Leitch et al., 2013; Ng and Kee 2018; Renko et al., 2015). Therefore, to study the relationship between these two variables, the entrepreneurial leader is likely to be the most appropriate unit of analysis. According to Davidsson and Wiklund (2006) a business as a unit of analysis could have three entities. Firstly, all business functions are controlled by a group of individuals or an individual. So, the entrepreneurial leader would be the individual unit to follow and analyse the impact that this individual makes over time in the business. Secondly, the unit of analysis could be a particular product or an entire business concept like franchising. Finally, the unit of analysis could be a governance structure, or a decision-making unit, closely administrated and controlled and which could be a business location, a company, or the whole group. The research to date, according to Davidsson and Wiklund (2006), has 'overlapped' these three units of

analysis and can make the computation of business growth ambiguous and difficult to measure. Nevertheless, for this research is aligned to the first unit of analysis mentioned above being the entrepreneurial leader and their generation of augmented SME growth.

Davidsson and Wiklund (2006 p.50) concede that “entrepreneurial leadership research takes an interest in value creation at a societal level, and this is a focus of research in entrepreneurial studies that has yet to be explored”. However, they do offer a clear conceptualisation of the unit of analysis required for this type of research in that the ‘individual’ and their business ‘activities’ are explicitly favoured in entrepreneurial leadership research and business growth. This is an explicit advantage of using individual entrepreneurial leaders as the unit of analysis as it is a single unit from which to collect rich data. Sampling several leaders however can be difficult if sampling over a long period of time as activities can develop and change. It is however easier than ‘activities’ as units of analysis as these can be complex in each business entity. However, the growth of specific activities would be related to the individual leaders as their decisions would naturally have an impact on the key activities that are of value to them and therefore important in growth terms.

Therefore, the attempt from the outset to clearly conceptualise the individual entrepreneurial leader as the unit of analysis (independent variable) is paramount for good research design and is confirmed for this research project. Furthermore, the operationalisation and measurement of SME growth (dependent variable) must also be considered carefully by the researcher, whether that is sales growth as the universal choice in entrepreneurship research, although as previously discussed, sales alone are an inadequate measure (Penrose, 1959). Again, it is a matter of matching the conceptualisation of the business, the theoretical perspective (individual) and the purpose of the study (Davidsson and Wiklund 2006 p59) aligned to the growth measure and this will have a huge impact on the outcomes of the research.

Therefore, depending on the unit of analysis chosen by the researcher interpretations and conclusions will differ. The entrepreneurial leader, the volume of activities and the outputs they create will, in most cases, be related to employment and assets and therefore the entrepreneurial leader’s capabilities are instrumental for generating

growth of sales and other outcomes culminating in SME growth. Davidsson and Wiklund (2006 p. 54) support this when they assert that “multiple indicators of growth give richer information and may therefore enhance single indicators providing proper analytical techniques are applied making multiple measures most relevant”. Indeed Cohen (2020 p.24) purports, “if we value the contribution made by people and businesses to society and to the planet, as well as the money they make, that will lead to a new definition of success...and the value of profit itself”. Other scholars have recommended and conducted further research into financial and non-financial SME growth performance measures (Rojas-Lema et al., 2021 and Alves and Lourenço, 2022). To understand further the dependant variable for this research it is therefore pertinent to examine the literature into the small to medium sized enterprise (SMEs).

#### 2.12.1 A definition of the SME

The Small Business Act (1953) defined a small business as ‘one that is independently owned and operated and not dominant in its field of operation’. However, a clear definition (aside from the legal one) has consistently proved elusive for researchers (Storey, 1994). This is because a small firm in the digital industries for example may have five employees but have a sales turnover of five million pounds, whilst a car repair business who has five employees and a sales turnover of fifty thousand pounds is arguably a very different business model. The difficulty in defining the small business is also evidenced in the lack of consensus both internationally and at a European level (Storey and Green, 2010).

The Bolton committee (1971) attempted to define the small business enterprise from an economic and statistical position. As mentioned above, this received much criticism as various academics found many anomalies rendering research in small business troublesome. Storey (1994) argues that a ‘grounded’ economic definition of the small business is appropriate for those researchers exploring behavioural aspects of small firms whilst the statistical definitions are best used for operational aspects. Moreover, the European Commission attempted to resolve the issue of defining the small business enterprise by only using employees as the factor to define small businesses. This was the source of the term SME (small to medium enterprises) where ‘enterprises’ became the established term, and the sector was sub-divided into 3

elements: Micro-enterprises: 0-9 employees; Small enterprises: 10-49 employees; Medium enterprises: 50-249 employees. The reason the categories were divided around employee numbers is due to the significant shift of formality and structure when a micro business reaches the 10-employee threshold. These categories however do not allow for heterogeneity for measuring SME growth and therefore the definition is typically modified into the context that the small business is being examined.

The challenge of navigating the complexity around finding an SME definition can be alleviated using the popular analogy of the caterpillar and the butterfly. This is where a small business is not a small butterfly, or a large business is not a large caterpillar, they are one and the same insect although behave differently during the growth process. This supports the relatively sterile situation of debating the small business definition unless 'size' has an influence on performance behaviour. Consequently, to overcome the complexity of finding a definition of the small business, researchers typically use a definition which is conducive to their topic and target group (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2013; Headd and Saade, 2008; Filion, 1990). Therefore, for the purpose of this research SMEs between 0-249 employees will be the target sample to explore SME growth.

### 2.12.2 SME growth and priority measurements

The importance of being able to define small business growth is apparent when there are opportunities for government funding to support sustained SME growth. The limitations to deciding what SME growth factually means must be considered. The primary definition of SME growth originated from Penrose (1959 p.9) as being "an evolutionist process based on cumulative growth of collective knowledge". This single definition of SME growth has had much discourse over the years by numerous scholars (Delmar et al., 2003) who argue that business growth must be measured via a multidimensional definition as enterprise is varied and complex in SMEs. Janssen (2009) argues that the most popular growth measurement in SME's is employees (social) and sales (managerial).

Over the years, research in SME growth has led to generalisations of what business growth means, however it has primarily been in financial or measurable terms. Another



challenge of researching SME growth is the natural assumption by researchers that business growth is measured in amounts, for example sales, profit or job creation and this is the preferred outcome by business leaders (Siddiqui and Jan, 2017). Scholars for many years have collectively agreed that sales growth is the most reliable measure of business growth, not least because the information is easy to access and tabulate. (Uwitonze, 2016; Chege and Wang, 2020; ONS, 2019). Entrepreneurs also use sales growth as a measure of performance (Barkham et al., 1996). However, it is suggested that sales growth can be troublesome to measure when growth in a business is outsourced because in this case sales may grow, but job creation growth may not (Davidsson et al., 2022). Nevertheless, sales are a measure of the economic output of business growth activities in the creation of wealth (Uwitonze, 2016; Chege and Wang, 2020; ONS, 2019).

The creation of jobs is another economic measure of growth used by both practitioners and academics (Uwitonze, 2016; Chege and Wang, 2020) even though growth of employment is never a singular goal in business growth. Job creation is also noted as a key policy objective within an economy, in generating local economic growth (Invest NI Business Strategy 2017-21, p2; ONS, 2019). However, the assumption is that employment is closely related to sales growth and not necessarily profitability. Therefore, the complexity of defining what business growth is and what it means is multifaceted and complex. Indeed, job creation is used as a primary measure of growth though recently has received much scrutiny as the lead measurement of business growth by experts (Lamine and Brahim, 2022).

Modes of growth is another phenomenon that can be used to explain SME growth. This includes the concepts of diversification, integration, acquisitions and mergers. Scholars such as Davidsson and Delmar (2006); Lockett et al. (2011); and Levies et al. (1997) have all confirmed research findings on issues and effects regarding 'mode' of SME growth. However, mode of growth is not conducive to this research as this focuses on SME behaviour and not the individual entrepreneurial leader and their impact on activities stimulating SME growth in the generation of sales or jobs. Overall, measuring SME growth is complex (Tehseen et al., 2023) and narrow measures may also generate limitations to the research outcome (Levie et al., 2014).

There are numerous studies completed into the cause and effect of small business growth (Tehseen et al., 2023; Pauceanu, 2021). In addition, Storey (1994) reviewed 25 studies, Delmar (1997) 55 studies and Wiklund (1998) reviewed 70 studies to research the causes and effects of small firm growth. Interestingly, there were no robust generalisations concluded from these studies and instead, the work provided individual critical accounts of the causes and effects of firm growth (Okere et al., (2023). The main criticisms indicated concerns around “theoretical and methodological limitations” (Storey, 1994, p.5; Delmar 1997; Wiklund, 1998). It is apparent that even current knowledge about the causes and effects of SME growth is broad and inadequate (Tehseen et al., 2023).

The widely known and often cited paper in, business growth literature is that of Per Davidsson et al. (2013) who identified new opportunities for research into business growth. They argue that research to date has focused on the influence of enablers on the amount and volume of growth and is the most thoroughly researched area. It is debateable then that any further research studies should consider different factors to growth amount, as the heterogeneity of SME growth measures can permanently challenge any meaningful research findings. Davidsson and Wiklund (2013 p.56) recommend that research studies focusing on the value generated in small business growth beyond ‘amounts’ would prove to be more meaningful. More recently Kuckertz et al. (2023) has raised again the need to understand the meaning of SME growth.

Significantly, this shifts the researcher’s gaze from amount to the process of growth to create value to a business and positive social impact within a community. Davidsson and Wiklund, (2013 p.179) affirm that, “this is a sorely under-researched area, as relationships with antecedents and effects are of most interest”. Davidsson and Wiklund, (2013) also argue that the research that holds most promise will combine aspects of amount and process on business growth, shifting thinking towards the value of that growth. It is well established in the literature and government reports that economic SME growth is operationalised by the intentions and decisions of the entrepreneurial leader. However, there is limited research to evidence that entrepreneurial leadership enables social SME growth (Gasparin et al, 2020).

To assist in the generation of knowledge to fill this literature gap identified by Gebauer (2018) and Kuckertz et al. (2023) this research has created the unique term 'augmented' SME growth (as referred to in section 1.3). As detailed earlier, this thesis defines augmented SME growth as the shared outcomes of economic (commercial) and social growth in SMEs, conclusively providing a more holistic understanding of SME growth.

Having explored the literature on SME growth, the complexity of meaning and the creation of a more holistic understanding in augmented SME growth, the next step is to review grey literature to establish a context of SME growth in the UK, Northern Ireland and a foundation for this research.

### 2.12.3 A context of SME growth in the UK

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are an important part of any economy consistently contributing over 90% of businesses, 60% of employment and over 50% of GDP (BEIS, 2020). They are regarded as a key source of innovation and business growth, and so governments globally attempt to support SMEs. In the UK, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) make up 99.9% (BEIS, 2020) of the business population and therefore are a credible source of entrepreneurial leaders who want or need to grow their business and contribute to local economic development.

According to BEIS (2019) there were 5.9 million private sector businesses in the UK at the start of 2019. The components of this are 5.82 million small businesses (with 0 to 49 employees), 35,600 medium-sized businesses (with 50 to 249 employees), 7,700 large businesses (with 250 or more employees). Comparing this with 2018, the private sector business population has increased by 3.5% (+200,000 businesses) in the UK.

For clarity these statistics provide the only official estimate of the total number of private sector businesses in the UK (BEIS, 2019) and cover a wider range of businesses than the Office of National statistics outputs, which only report on VAT traders and PAYE employers. These statistics report on private sector businesses

only and exclude not for profit and government sectors. The BEIS (2019) report estimates the number of private sector businesses by combining estimated numbers of unregistered businesses with data on registered businesses derived from a comprehensive business register, the ONS Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The BEIS (2019) reports on the net change in the number of private sector businesses, but cannot be used to estimate numbers of business start-ups or closures which is not the focus of this research. Table 2.7 illustrates the composition of business population in the UK in 2019.

	<b>Businesses</b>	<b>Employment</b> <i>thousands</i>	<b>Turnover<sup>1</sup></b> <i>£ millions</i>
All businesses	5,867,770	27,498	4,149,973
SMEs (0-249 employees)	5,860,085	16,630	2,168,005
Small businesses (0-49 employees)	5,824,500	13,157	1,528,684
With no employees <sup>2</sup>	4,457,820	4,835	304,508
All employers	1,409,950	22,663	3,845,465
of which:			
1-9 employees	1,155,385	4,206	595,013
10-49 employees	211,295	4,116	629,163
50-249 employees	35,585	3,473	639,321
250 or more employees	7,685	10,868	1,981,968

1. Total turnover figures exclude Section K (financial and insurance activities) where turnover is not available on a comparable basis.

2. "With no employees" comprises sole proprietorships and partnerships with only a self-employed owner-manager(s) and companies with one employee, assumed to be an employee director.

Table 2.7 Estimated number of businesses in the UK private sector and their associated employment and turnover, by size of business, start of 2019. Source: BEIS (2019).

Of the 5.9 million UK private sector businesses, 1.4 million (24%) had employees and 4.5million (76%) had no employees. The SME sector is made up of 99.3% (0-49 employees) and 0.6% (50-249 employees) and this equates to 99.9% of the total business population in the UK.

SMEs contribute approximately half of the UK private sector turnover and employ three fifths (60%) of employees in the UK. In 2019, SMEs represented a turnover in the UK of £2.1 Trillion. Overall, the total employment in SMEs increased from 16.3 million at

the start of 2018 to 16.6 million at the start of 2019, a rise of 2%. These statistics confirm the vital importance of SMEs to the UK economy.

In understanding the landscape of SME businesses there are a significant number that do not have employees and sole proprietorships form the majority of the SME sector. Therefore, it is useful to know the legal form and distribution of these SMEs in the UK business landscape. The legal form of SMEs in the private sector has 3 sections, sole proprietorships, ordinary partnerships, and companies. Sole proprietorships are the most common legal form. Chart 2.1 shows by legal status, the number of businesses in the UK private sector with and without employees.

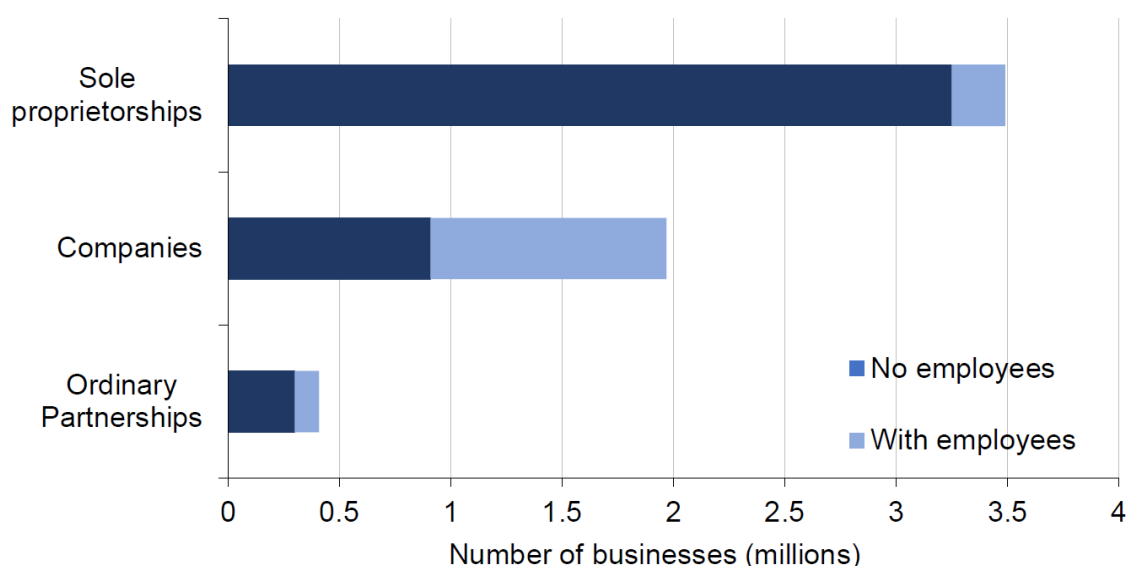


Chart 2.1 The number of businesses in the UK private sector with and without employees. Source: BEIS (2019).

Further to this many SMEs are not registered for VAT or PAYE and make up a significant percentage of the SME business population. The ONS (2019) recorded that 45% of the business population in the UK are registered for VAT and PAYE. The remaining 55% are trading without being registered and are classified as 'un-registered'. The total number of private sector businesses in the UK are divided into 5.2 million private sector businesses in England, 334,000 in Scotland, 222,000 in Wales, and 124,000 in Northern Ireland (BEIS, 2018). Knowledge of the differing industrial sectors also serves to understand the SME landscape in the UK. Chart 2.2

shows the UK Industrial sectors with highest SME turnover and employment, as percentage of total SME employment and turnover.

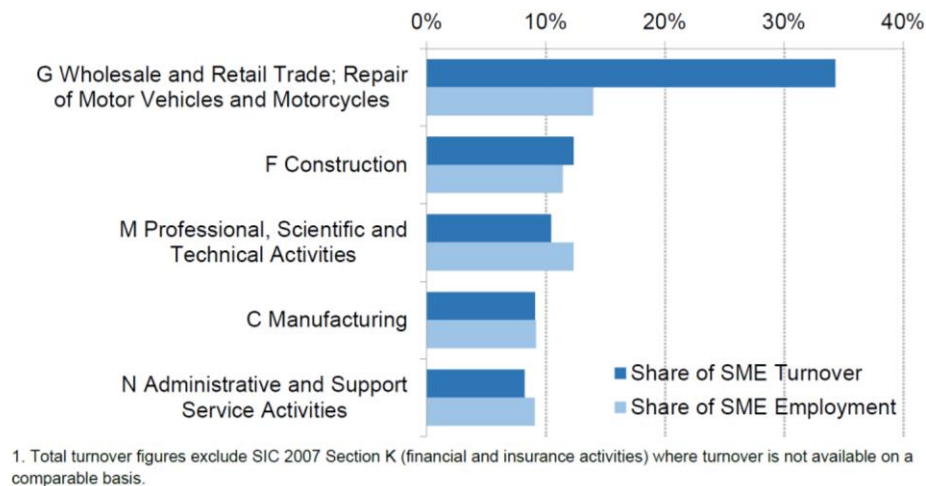
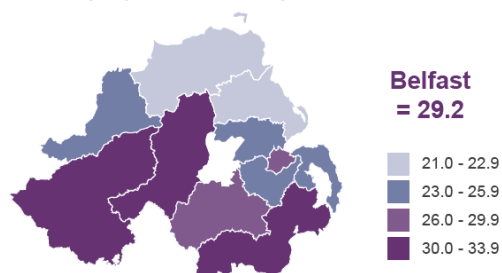


Chart 2.2 UK Industrial sectors with highest SME turnover and employment, as percentage of total SME employment and turnover. Source: BEIS (2019).

#### 2.11.4 A context of SME growth in Northern Ireland

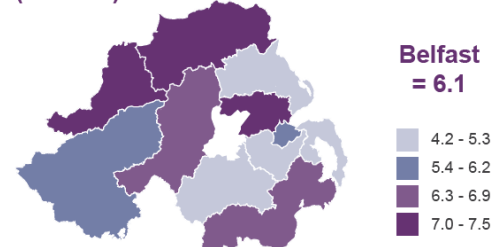
In Northern Ireland small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are at the core of the local economy and form the socio-economic backbone of the urban and rural communities. They account for 99.1% (BEIS, 2019) of all enterprises in Northern Ireland and employ more people than all larger businesses and the entire public sector combined. There were 124,000 SMEs throughout Northern Ireland in 2018 (Source: BEIS, Business Population estimates, 2018). To explore this further and contextualise this research it is necessary to understand the nature, demography, and characteristics of the SME landscape in Northern Ireland. Figure 2.12 of Northern Ireland show the growth metrics for start-up and existing firms and how they are distributed throughout the region.

##### Start-ups per 10,000 Population



Number of start-ups can be seen as a headline metric of "entrepreneurial ability" and show variation across NI.

##### High-Growth Incidence Rate, 20% threshold (2014-17)



High-Growth Firms are defined here as businesses with annual average employment growth of 20% or more over a three year period.

Figure 2.12 Business structure at council level in Northern Ireland. Source: Office for National Statistics (2017)

Figure 2.13 shows the positive productivity incidence rate (2014-2017) in Northern Ireland showing a higher rate in the immediate areas surrounding Belfast City area.

#### Positive Productivity Incidence Rate (2014-17)

Positive productivity growth is where turnover and employment both increased, turnover at a faster rate.

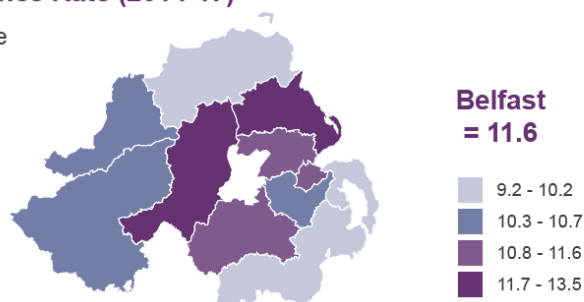


Figure 2.13 Positive productivity incidence rate (2014-2017) Source: Enterprise Research Centre (2018)

In 2018 the age in relation to the population in Northern Ireland is measured in 4 categories, 21% are less than 15 years, 31% are 16-39 years, 32% is 40-64 and 16% are 65+ (NISRA, 2018). The total amount of people employed in Northern Ireland is 69% (806,000) and in addition to this 16% of the population are self-employed NISRA (Labour Force Survey). Employees are an important asset in SMEs and research has argued that their knowledge, working experience, attitude and personal network capabilities affect SME performance and business development (Bain and Company Guide, 2017; Brouthers and Nakos, 2004).

In the three main sectors in the Northern Ireland economy 5% of jobs are in construction, 11% are in manufacturing and 82% in Professional Services (NISRA, 2018). Over one quarter (27%) of jobs in Northern Ireland are in the public sector, while the remaining 73% are in the private sector (Business register and employment survey, NISRA, 2018).

According to the Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR), there are just over 76,000 businesses registered in Northern Ireland. This does not include those that are self-employed and are not registered for VAT or PAYE (one-person businesses). Accounting for the BEIS (2018) measurement of 124,000 private sector businesses in NI, then almost 48,000 businesses are VAT unregistered SMEs. Chart 2.3 below shows the ratio of businesses by size in Northern Ireland.

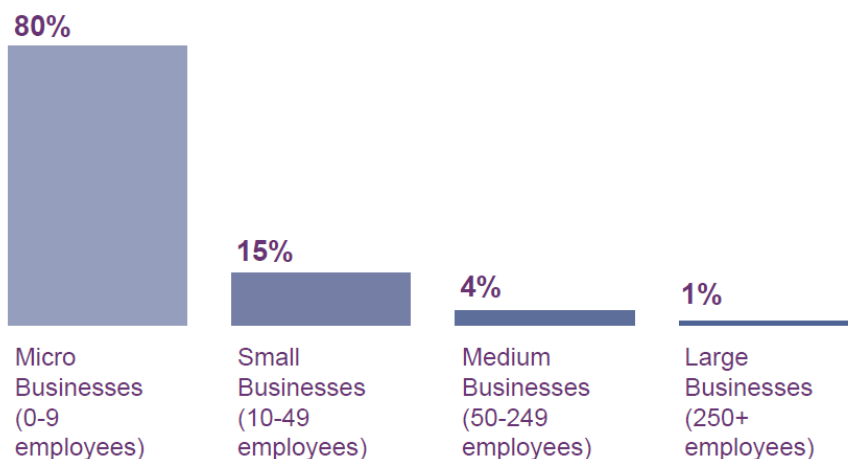


Chart 2.3 Businesses by size in Northern Ireland. Source: IDPR (2018)

Figure 2.14 below illustrates the percentage of businesses by sector in Northern Ireland, with professional services being the biggest, followed by agriculture and then finally construction.

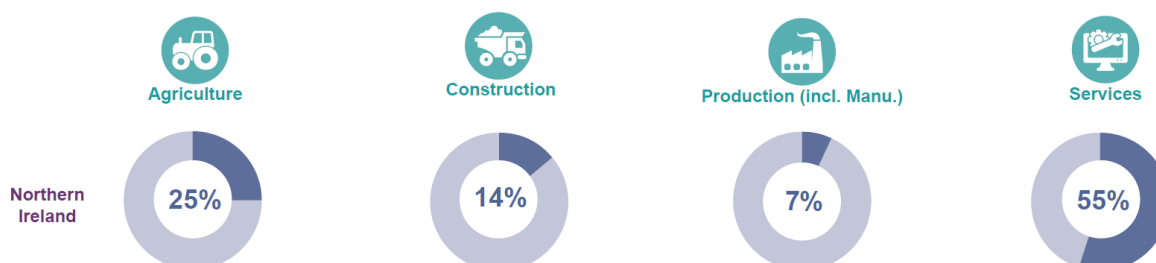


Figure 2.14 Percentage of businesses by sector in Northern Ireland. Source: IDPR (2018)



It is well known that both the UK Industrial Strategy White Paper (2017) and the Northern Ireland draft Industrial Strategy (2017-30) stress the importance of SME growth and use job creation as a measure of performance. The reports suggest that Government intends to support the start-up phase less and invest more time in those businesses that are established (over one year old) and have the potential to grow. SMEs are led by entrepreneurial leaders deemed to be essential drivers of positive societal and economic growth (GEM, 2021) through exploiting opportunity, creating jobs, and endeavouring to meet the challenges of the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) provides insight into these entrepreneurial leadership endeavours and is a rich source of information for research to inform policy.

This section (2.11) has established an understanding of SMEs, the challenges of measurement and a contextualisation of the research location in Northern Ireland within the UK. The next section (2.12) will examine the widely accepted economically enabling role of the entrepreneurial leader in an SME. It will discuss the importance of enabling economic SME Growth (2.12.1) followed by known inhibitors to economic SME growth. The primary intentions of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs regarding growth are then discussed leading to the debate on the 'meaning' of SME growth in entrepreneurial leadership.

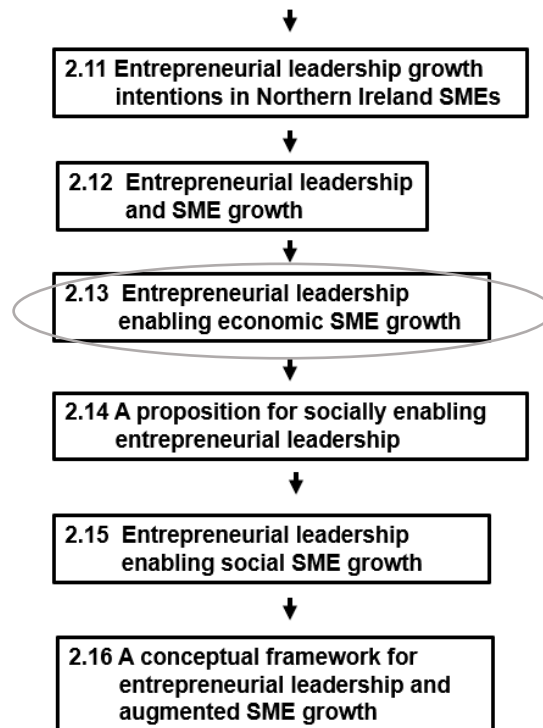


Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

### 2.13 Entrepreneurial leadership as an enabler of economic SME growth

This section will explore how entrepreneurial leadership might enable economic SME growth by reviewing the importance of SME growth, the obstacles, and primary intentions to enable SME growth. Finally, the section explores the meaning of SME growth to entrepreneurial leaders, as this will illuminate the entrepreneurial leader's perception of the value of SME social growth.

#### 2.13.1 Importance of enabling economic SME growth

Storey (1994) identified 3 key enablers to the growth of the small business.

- 1) The background and access to resources by the entrepreneurial leader
- 2) The business itself
- 3) Strategic decisions taken by the entrepreneurial leader once in business

All three enablers must be synchronised for growth to occur, and this is troublesome when trying to predict the success of a business. This perspective is important to note as individuals start a business for many reasons, not just the primary goal of making a profit (Davidsson, 1989; Delmar, 1996; Kolvereid, 1992; Storey, 1994). Douglas and Shepherd (2000) claim the main reasons for starting a business are enjoying independence and having autonomy in implementing your own ideas. This all depends however on the relationship between the motivations and goals of the entrepreneurial leader and their drive to maximise profit.

Business growth in SMEs is a combination of the owner manager's ambitions, intentions and competencies, regional resources, infrastructure, and government support mechanisms (Storey 1994; Glancey 1998; Mitra and Matlay 2000; Shaw and Conway 2000). Davidsson (1989, 1991) argues that the 'will' of the entrepreneurial leader, ability to grasp opportunity and a need to be creative are the key factors for the sustained survival of a business. This is endorsed by Janssen (2006) who concluded that only the expertise and demographics of an entrepreneurial leader have an influence on business growth, further revealing that motivation, psychological traits, an entrepreneurial family, and the existence of a management team have no influence on business growth.

### 2.13.2 Obstacles to economic SME growth

Obstacles to business growth include macro-economic factors like finance, human resources, and markets. For SMEs in the UK, factors such as the Covid19 pandemic and Brexit have also been realised as recent obstacles to business growth. External obstacles to SME growth include elements such as macro regional resources, infrastructure, and government support mechanisms (Storey, 1994; Glancey 1998; Mitra and Matlay, 2000; Shaw and Conway, 2000). Since SME growth is determined by adoption to change, those entrepreneurial leaders who are more agile to changes in the external environment are more likely to have high growth intentions (Gray, 2002). Morrison et al. (2003) argue that growth orientated SMEs are balanced around the three factors of entrepreneurial intention, business acumen and opportunities in the wider macro-environment and that all three are interdependent.

Regarding internal obstacles to SME growth, it is apparent in the literature that many businesses never grow (McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010) and only a small number are interested in business growth (Gray, 1998; Chaston, 2008). The influence of the 'will' of the entrepreneurial leader can be a factor (Davidsson, 2013). There are also internal factors for example finance, capability/skills, technology, and the resource of time. There is a core interest in the literature in seeking to understand why some businesses grow and others do not (Audretsch et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2006; McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010; Anderson and Ullah, 2014; Gebauer, 2018).

Avoidance of risk by the entrepreneurial leader is another credible reason why business growth may be stifled in SMEs (Poutziouris, 2003). Many entrepreneurial leaders are more anxious about bankruptcy risk, crises survival, employee well-being and a general loss of control, all of which lead to negative attitudes and render them growth averse. Nevertheless, whilst increased profitability can be the driver of some SMEs, increasingly more of these businesses are driven by value related factors (Douglas, 2013), like generating positive social aspects for their employees, community well-being and prosperity.

### 2.13.3 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth

Guieu and Guieu, (2014) argue that it is the leader's actions, driven by their thinking that ignites business growth. Gasse (1996) claims that entrepreneurial leaders combine key elements of growth around vision, circumstances, and potential. Supporting this Chan et al. (2006 p.429) declare that "the motivations of small business owners regarding growth are influenced by a wide variety of values, perceptions, and desired outcomes". Guieu and Guieu (2014) posit that the high growth leader can be set apart from 'normal SME leaders' given they have characteristics of fear that growth may be stifled or stopped in the future.

Gherhes et al. (2016) argues that there is a complex network of pressurised factors that can influence decision making and subsequent performance for an entrepreneurial leader's enterprise. These factors include the disproportionate reliance on the entrepreneurial leader, their experience, human and social capital, and

their time to develop resilience before business failure ensues (Gherhes et al., 2016). Thus, positive behaviour in the entrepreneurial leader is a critical human value to diminish negativity, adversity and pursue business enterprise survival (Scott and Bruce, 1987). This highlights that there is one common golden thread through all of these factors that impacts on growth which is the interpretation, decision making and consequent behaviours of the entrepreneurial leader. Gray (2000) and Maki and Pukkinen (2000) argue that SME growth is neither a clearly evidenced pathway nor just a matter of luck, instead it is the pursuit of the owner manager to reach desired business outcomes.

Gherhes et al. (2016) meta-analysis of the SME literature identified that the direction of current research in SME growth indicates that the entrepreneurial leader's growth ambition is sourced in a desire to succeed, reasons for starting a business (motivation), expected outcomes, ability, and opportunity. Perren's (1999 p.369) research finds that the desire to succeed, where success equates with business growth and is financially oriented, is "vital in such small firms, being an essential growth driver". This is underpinned by Walsh and Anderson (1995) who in their research identified that founding-leaders have more innovative problem-solving styles than non-founding-leaders. Further to this, scholars argue that higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy were also identified in founding leaders (Chen, et al., 1998). Consequently, entrepreneurial leaders tend to show entrepreneurial behaviours and follow their instincts. Makki and Pukkinen (2000) purport that there are three owner manager drivers to small business growth, and these are intention, ability and opportunity to grow. Their research suggests that these three drivers and the associated inhibitors must be understood for the owner's growth ambitions to be achieved and would provide a valuable framework to identify such businesses and inform research design for empirical research.

Figure 2.15 illustrates the socio-economic world view of how the decision-making entrepreneurial leader may impact their decision to grow their business, depending on how they interpret growth and inhibiting factors (Gray, 2000).

	<b>Pro-Growth Factors</b>	<b>Inhibiting Factors</b>
Intention	Demographic variables Personal characteristics Values and beliefs	Lack of ambition and vision Anti-business “hobbyist” approach Quality of lifestyle protectionism Mature position in life-cycle
Ability	Educational level Knowledge of different fields of business Perception/actual of owner-managers competence Growth potential products, assets and premises Legal format of business Proactive learning through social, informal networks	Constrained managerial competencies Narrow skills base Physical expansion/production limitations Organisational structure results in lack of time and resources
Opportunity	Market conditions Access to finance Public sector regulation Labor market	Weak power position within the industry sector and markets High dependency on externalities Adverse financial and economic conditions Unhelpful local government approach to business development Constraining government regulation and communication

Figure 2.15 Small Business enabling and inhibiting factors

Sources: Burke and Jarrat 2000; Maki and Pukkinen 2000; Gray 2000; Bridge, O’Neill, and Cromie 1998; Morrison, Rimmington, and Williams 1999; Heffernan and Flood 2000; Sherwood et al. 2000.

Therefore, understanding business growth enablers relies on contextualising the growth and inhibiting factors and the effect these have on the entrepreneurial leader’s decisions. Naturally these decisions will impact the direction of collective resources and their exploitation of opportunity that drives the business to achieve its growth objective.

Kelvie et al. (2017 p.273) argue that “it is the business leader’s ‘intention’ that will shape the direction, persistence and intensity of action for business growth”. Therefore, it is the ‘intention’ of the leader towards firm growth that indicates whether growth is slow, fast or merely sustainable. Despite the extant literature on business growth intention or ‘orientation’ (Davidsson et al., 2010; McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010) the focus of the research literature for theory building has never been able to establish

theory around 'how businesses grow'. The reason for this is most probably the complexity of variables in the small business growth literature but also a tendency to focus on the wrong reasons (Edwards and Berry, 2010) like solely maximising profit.

McKelvie et al. (2017) relied on their research into 282 young firms in the digital sectors in Sweden. They argued that intention to grow rests on the leader's 'will' to reach their ambitions, through innovative activities, regardless of whether there is a loss of growth (Koudstaal et al., 2016). The focus of McKelvie et al's. (2017) research was discovering more about what business leaders actually do as opposed to what they intend to do. McKelvie et al. (2017) argue that their research provides a more robust platform for theory building, based on risk taking behaviour with innovation to explain why some businesses grow and others do not. However, some limitations to McKelvie's research are the bias that exists in the sampling method and their ability to explain only a limited amount of the growth of young ventures because of the leader's growth orientation and innovative activities. This led to flawed recommendations for policy creation to direct resources to high growth businesses who have research and development functions for innovation, a business function that would rarely exist in the SME sector.

Nevertheless, growth intention, regardless of the size of business, does impact business growth and is also widely critiqued in the entrepreneurial literature (Riding et al. 2010; Wiklund and Shepherd 2011). This concurs with the growing literature around growth attitude, orientation, and motivation, all of which use their own measurements of their impact on business growth. Bargh et al. (2010 p.268) describe motivation as "why a person in a given situation selects one response over another or makes a given response in great energisation and frequency". It follows then that those leaders who intend to grow their business actively pursue activities to achieve their ambition (Kanfer, 1990), including behaviours of risk taking and persistence to do so (Locke and Latham, 1990), all of which reflects the leader's decision-making intentions and subsequently, their strategic action. Nevertheless, McKelvie et al. (2017) research shows that the business leader's intended behaviours and actions do impact on growth outcomes because of the antecedents effecting business growth, be that growth in amount or growth in value.

As a psychological construct, motivation is an important perspective within entrepreneurial research behaviours and one such area within this is business growth. Business growth is one of the key indicators of success in a small business and the entrepreneur reflects their effort and motivation to achieve success (Bhidé, 1999; Venkataraman, 1997; Davidsson et al., 2002; La Barbera and Ajzen, 2020). There has been extensive research into examining the positive connection between business growth and entrepreneurial motivation (Baum et al., 1998; Baum et al., 2001; Kolvereid and Bullvag, 1996; Miner et al., 1989; Kautonen et al., 2015; Ajzen and Kruglanski, 2019; Tallia and Hafeez, 2022). Growth motivation is sometimes referred to as growth aspiration to extend the business through the subjective norms, choices, and efforts of the entrepreneur. This concurs with Ajzen's (1991, 2019) theory of planned behaviour.

Dutton (1993) asserts that an entrepreneurial leader's intentional behaviour is in some way informed by a perception that leads to action for business growth. This intention to grow a business is the motivation that can influence both effort and willingness for business growth. Delmar and Wiklund (2008) and Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) contend that growth intention, aspirations and expectations can predict business growth, however these depend on two antecedents, namely perceived desirability and feasibility of the growth. This concurs with the literature where the entrepreneur's attitude to income (wealth), risk and decision-making autonomy (flexibility), work effort and enjoyment are ways of measuring perceived desire for business growth (McGee et al., 2009 and Chen et al., 1998). In addition, Douglas (2013) declared that entrepreneurial leaders who are growth orientated were more negative about work enjoyment and focused more on financial success. Self-efficacy was found by Chen et al. (1998) to align closely to perceived desirability of business growth where the entrepreneurial leader believes they have the successful capability to behave and make the appropriate entrepreneurial decisions. Bandura (1997) completed a meta-study that evidenced the impact of self-efficacy on motivation that subsequently leads to high performance in individuals. Self-efficacy therefore influences behaviour through persistence, clear direction and an intensity of focus on action. Baum and Bird (2010) assert that a lack of self-efficacy leads to little or no accomplishment. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is known by scholars to predict business growth particularly in SMEs (Baum et al., 2001; Baum and Locke, 2004).



The goal setting theory confirmed by Locke and Latham (2002) is also associated with the motivation theory surrounding entrepreneurial leaders and SME growth. This is where research evidence supports the view that in SMEs, more audacious goals promote higher performance than less ambitious goals. In summary, the discussion indicates that the extant literature endorses the critical nature of business growth and is underpinned by the entrepreneurial leader's motivation, intention, and goal setting as significant factors in business growth. On the other end of the behavioural spectrum a fear of failure is another significant element that can impact business growth. Whilst this is more aligned to business start-up behaviour (Hessels et al., 2011) it can also ingrain persistent endeavours to ensure survival in growing businesses (Mitchell and Shepherd, 2010).

It is clear from this discussion that the psychology surrounding the decision making of the entrepreneurial leader is pivotal to the choice and pursuit of intended growth goals. What is not clear in the literature on the psychology of the entrepreneurial leader is an understanding as to why some SME businesses do not grow. Yet the focus of policy tends to mitigate psychological barriers as to why entrepreneurial leaders might prefer sustained growth as opposed to fast or scale up growth. Consequently, an entrepreneurial leader's motivation has an influence on the outcomes of small business growth which may explain why many business growth outcomes are unique.

Several studies in the 1990's took place to measure the impact of motivation of the business owner on firm growth using a longitudinal design measuring growth within a certain amount of time and the impact of the business owner's motivation (Bellu and Sherman, 1995; Kolvereid and Bullvåg, 1996). The results of these studies found that there is some relationship between motivation and business growth but not a strong correlation. A further limitation to these studies was that other variables were not considered outside of motivation and growth, for example owner manager capability, access to resources and macro-economic conditions (Colvin and Slevin, 1997). Ajzen (1991) argues that there is a strong relationship between individual capability and motivation, and this is underpinned by the theory of planned behaviour that provides a fuller understanding of motivation, business growth and a consideration of resources and possible opportunities to grow a business. The theory of planned behaviour adds

aspects of an individual's ability and extends the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991). Using the framework of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour, Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) completed a longitudinal study of 200 independent small businesses in Sweden over a period of 6 years. They found that small business leaders' aspirations to grow a business are positively related to business growth. Therefore, the individual (unit of analysis) access to resources, their own experience and education do impact behavioural control toward opportunities that are of interest to their individual performance and subsequent business outcomes. This view is captured in the following.

“Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert in order to perform the behaviour. Generally, the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour, the more likely should be its performance”

(Ajzen, 1991 p.181).

Based on the theory of planned behaviour, Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) conclude from their study that higher aspirations for growth achieve higher levels of business growth, and that the individual's human capital and wider resources have an impact on the achieved level of growth. Thus, when making decisions there is a place for understanding what the entrepreneurial leader believes about access to resources as this can shape decisions and behavioural outcomes and therefore business practices (Wiklund et al., 2003). In their study, the growth impact was measured in sales and employment levels against the aspirations of education, experience, environmental dynamism, and financial resources. The importance of this work to the current research is that it demonstrates the importance of researching both the entrepreneurial leader's growth aspirations and achieved growth as a valid contribution to the literature.

In this research it is important to take growth 'intention' into account as without it, it would be impossible to explain why some firms only grow marginally or not at all. Entrepreneurial leaders need to be able to identify opportunity, secure resources within a 'growth' environment and know that their aspirations for growth will facilitate

growth achievement otherwise the business is unlikely to expand. This research also recommends that individual leaders cannot be studied separately and should invariably and consistently be studied around the interaction of the leader within their own specific context.

The assumption however of Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) in their study, is that all individual business leaders want to grow their business and economic growth is the jewel in the crown of business success. There is no indication in their research that volume of growth (economic output) for some small business owners is an 'acquired taste' and 'social' growth by engaging with the wider community may be more important to these individuals and the reason why an SME has only marginal growth economically. Nevertheless, the research shows the reliability of the theory of planned behaviour in that an entrepreneurial leader's growth aspirations are positively linked to individual capability, access to opportunity and resource to sustain business survival and growth. However, in many cases the lack of structure and experience of an emerging SME entrepreneurial leader does not provide the anticipated financial outcomes that are accepted as measures of success (Renko, 2017). The perception of the entrepreneurial leader and policy influencers is that an SMEs measurable outputs of success are critical for local economic development. The plethora of published local government reports reviewed earlier in this chapter, rely from the outset on measures of sales and job creation as the key measures of SME growth success and positive economic impact.

#### 2.13.4 The meaning of SME growth to entrepreneurial leaders

It is known that entrepreneurs start and operate their own businesses for many reasons other than, or in addition to maximising profit (Davidsson, 1989a; Delmar, 1996; Kolvereid, 1992; Storey, 1994). Douglas and Shepherd (2000) showed from their research that personal goals like independence and flexibility were stated as key reasons for starting and running a business. Extensive research has however concluded that, in a significant number of enterprises, lack of ambition is a constraint as many entrepreneurial leader's value non-economic impacts as a measure of success and are not necessarily driven by the financial imperatives, particularly the case in 22-25% of SMEs (Gherhes et al., 2016).

Therefore, in understanding the meaning of SME growth, it is important to consider the position that some SME businesses do not want to grow their business for fear of losing lifestyle benefits (Weber et al., 2015), including independence, increased leisure time, family flexibility objectives and personal job satisfaction (Douglas, 2013), these being more 'value' related factors that impact on societal prosperity and well-being. Anderson and Ullah (2014 p.328) identify this as the "condition of smallness" and a lack of intention to grow. They used data from 2.5K businesses through the federation of Small Business on the condition of smallness. They argue that small businesses purposively stay small so that they do not have to employ more people. Indeed, attitude frames an entrepreneur's growth motivation or their reluctance to grow (Davidsson, 1989, 1991) and provides a general explanation. Anderson and Ullah (2014 p.328) identify that "attitudes are learned and influence intentions to grow economically and this experience in turn can form an attitude to growth". This means that attitudes are shaped by being a small business and some entrepreneurial leaders are more comfortable having a certain size of business as they know the benefits, limitations, and pragmatic reasons why it might be better to stay small and avoid the problems of growing a business.

SMEs are highly dependent on banks, suppliers, and customers (Degeorge and Fayolle, 2011) however Cowling and Westhead (1996) indicated from their research, the unwillingness of small business owners to involve unfamiliar individuals even if it had a positive impact on growth. Chaston and Gregory (2012) noted that the entrepreneur's aversion to losing control is influenced by their own world view of being 'independent' when making business decisions that may deter business growth. Hence, what SME growth means to entrepreneurial leaders is complex and influences their intentions and motivation to grow.

There are many reasons why entrepreneurial leaders start their SME but decide not to grow it. Welbourne et al. (2012) noted that while an entrepreneur may start a business their ambition may not be to grow it because their choices may include such reasons as freedom to make own decisions, popularity, respect, flexibility and being their own boss and these reasons may restrict growth (Holland and Shepherd, 2011). Furthermore, the influence of growth may impact negatively on these desirable SME

advantages (Connon et al., 2012) that may not be negotiable in the entrepreneurial leader's decision-making approach. The other factor that can obscure growth meaning is the very introduction of 'change' into a business which can create uncertainty, introduce new resources to manage and create conflict that for entrepreneurial leaders may be unappealing. Indeed, SMEs because of the short communication lines, can create a sense of shared identity and have strong personal relationships that can circumvent conflict. Understanding the entrepreneurial leader's individual, social and economic motivations are key in understanding the meaning of SME growth. The discussion so far indicates that being a small business can in fact be a huge advantage for an entrepreneurial leader (Smith and Tang, 2012). It also evidences the reasons why some successful businesses do not grow and benefits this can bring during uncertain times to entrepreneurial leaders who aim to sustain the status quo growth in their SME.

The literature and discussion thus far suggest that the decisions of the entrepreneurial leader are the critical factor in generating SME growth success outputs (Leitch et al., 2018, Simba and Thai, 2019). Furthermore, evidence of SME growth success is typically disseminated through wider government reports based on measurable economic outputs such as sales and job creation (Yazdanfar and Ohman, 2019; Invest NI Business Strategy 2017-21, p.2). This research seeks to challenge whether the economic outputs driven by entrepreneurial leadership are sufficient measures of SME growth. Indeed, there is a growing trend toward a broader measure of SME growth, generated by entrepreneurial leaders, contributing to the positive impact SMEs have on community prosperity (Eggers et al., 2013; Eggers, 2020).

This section has examined the widely accepted, economically enabling role of the entrepreneurial leader in an SME and the various challenges and perceptions of what SME growth means to entrepreneurial leaders. The following section circled in figure 2.4 below, will present a proposition for socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership and argues, based on the discussion thus far, that entrepreneurial leaders additionally enable social growth within their SME.

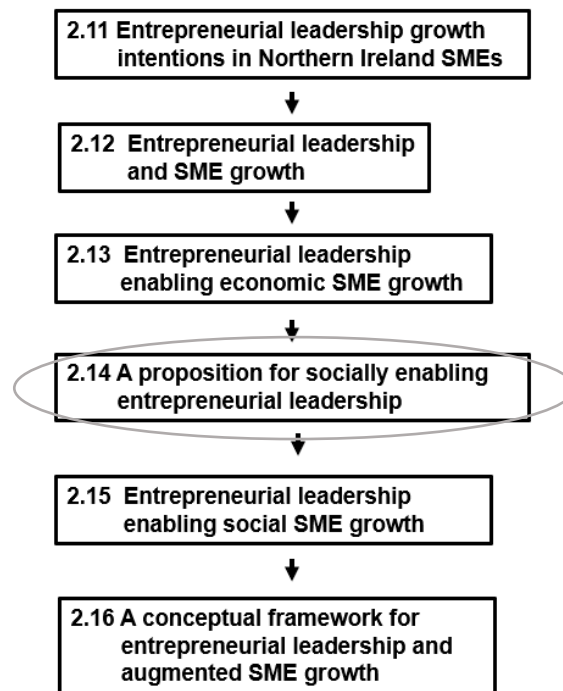


Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

#### 2.14 A proposition for socially enabling entrepreneurial leadership

Ahmad et al., (2022) assert that entrepreneurial leaders are primarily motivated extrinsically to increase their wealth through SME growth. This suggests an emphasis in the current definition of entrepreneurial leadership that success is measured through profit maximisation. However, it is proposed that the ‘hidden’ value of social growth in commercial SMEs is not currently measured or defined in entrepreneurial leadership theory. Consequently, this research exposes a gap in the SME entrepreneurial leadership literature and therefore seeks to modify entrepreneurial leadership theory in the context of SME growth. Arguably the emerging entrepreneurial leader demonstrates capability beyond profit maximisation, evidencing positive social intentions in their daily business activities. Hence reflecting the rising collective social conscience immersed in the Global Sustainable Development Goals to 2030. This is an important development for policy makers and governments to note when reporting on the socio-economic success of a nation.

Research from Harvard (Leavy, 2012) focused on 'higher ambition' leaders. The 36 individual leaders researched showed that higher ambition leaders were distinguished by the volume of work they invested into building a strong community with a common purpose spanning diverse global operation, and in the personal asset they created by being visible and communicating purpose, family and strategy. Similarly, they devised many ways to attach different parts of the firm to each other emotionally and socially. What stood out in the study of the 36 leaders was their "deep commitment to the emerging potential of their firms to create superior and lasting social and economic value, and to achieve both goals concurrently" (Leavy, 2012 p.8). Leavy's (2012) research claims that the higher 'ambition' leader role is not the norm and a key area for entrepreneurial leadership development to build more robust and sustainable businesses. Colleagues such as Stam et al. (2012 p.40) also argue that an ambitious entrepreneurial leader is "someone who engages in the entrepreneurial process with the aim of creating as much value as possible...identifies and exploits opportunities...to maximise value creation be that profit or wider impacts". The wider impacts of ambition beyond 'profit maximisation' implies that the nuanced entrepreneurial leader's intention is beyond economic success and aligns with Leavy's (2012) concurrent social and economic goals.

Having established that entrepreneurial leaders display socially enabling behaviours within SMEs, the following section (2.14) located in Figure 2.4 below will discuss models of socially enabling entrepreneurship and their relevance for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth. The importance of enabling social SME growth (2.14.1) will be discussed and the implications this has for community activities (2.14.2) and relationships (2.14.3). Moreover, new principles at a macro level and subsequent practices operationally are showing promising ways to influence entrepreneurial leaders' enablement of social growth in SMEs. Therefore, the influence of social responsibility in enabling SME social growth will be examined (2.14.4) including CSR (2.14.4.1), Industry 5.0 (2.14.4.2) Sustainable Development Goals (2.14.4.3) and ESG and B Corporations (2.14.4.4). Finally, the challenges of measuring social SME growth are discussed (2.14.5).

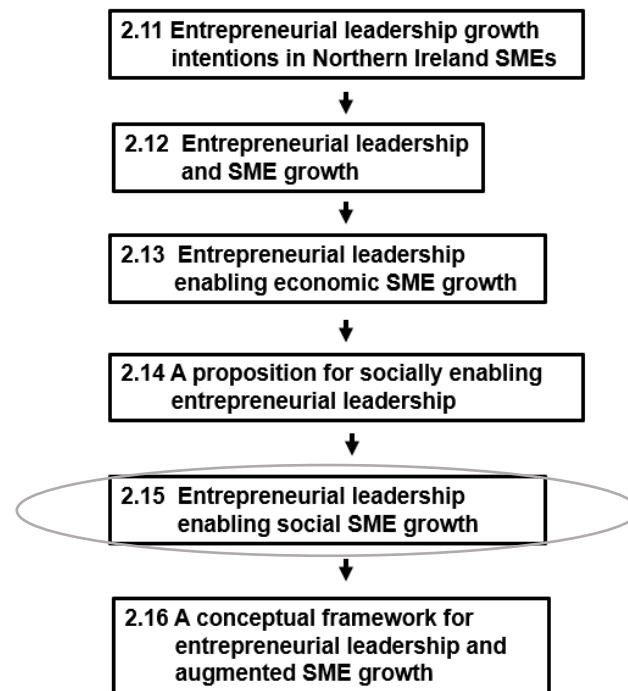


Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

### 2.15 Entrepreneurial leadership enabling social SME growth

Accepting the primary aim of a commercial SME is to maximise profit (Wiklund et al., 2003), successful social entrepreneurial leadership is measured on positive social outcomes. Social outcomes for a community provide wider gains for social cohesion, community integration, prosperity, and well-being (Chell et al., 2016). This section of the literature review firstly examines the role of the social entrepreneur in attaining purely positive social outcomes for a community and to recognise any similarity with the intentions of an SME entrepreneurial leader. Following this, emergent indicators of the rising social conscience of SME entrepreneurial leaders are examined, fundamentally contributing to the conceptual framework, and understanding of augmented growth.

Nicholls (2006) has referred to the concept of social entrepreneurship as rather nebulous. A social entrepreneur has personal characteristics that support their pursuit



of social value creation including leadership and creativity. Bielefeld (2012) argues that the social entrepreneur is sourced in a Schumpeterian ideology of the entrepreneur. "The social entrepreneur is a change maker, they possess the classical characteristics of an entrepreneur but are motivated by a social mission" (Bielefeld, 2012 p.148). A social entrepreneur also has many of the behaviours and characteristics that are associated with the business entrepreneur, however the market for the social entrepreneur is the community and their purpose is caring for their well-being as opposed to making a financial profit. Nevertheless, social entrepreneurship also demonstrates the value of financial resources and the skills they require to manage this. Research by Leadbeater (1997) identified that social entrepreneurs are normally striving to regenerate the local community but some examples, including The Body Shop, a global profitable brand with an ethos about helping the Third world, the environment and preservation projects, have demonstrated reaching national and international levels. The research also showed that most social entrepreneurs lead small enterprises that do not grow to medium sized enterprises and are also reluctant to call themselves a business because of their social conscience. They do have the characteristics of a successful SME entrepreneur except they have a strong obligation to build a better future for the community which is critical for a more inclusive form of socio-economic development.

#### 2.15.1 The importance of enabling social SME growth.

Despite the challenges of defining a social enterprise the Department of Trade and Industry defines a social enterprise as a "business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners" (DTI, 2002). In addition, scholars have also defined the social enterprise as a means to create social value (Quandt et al., 2017), and a search for a sustainable balance between the social and commercial aspects of social entrepreneurship (Hynes, 2009; Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2011; Chell et al., 2016). Social enterprises therefore have a social purpose where profit is not their primary objective as they are not owned by shareholders, with Bornstein and Davis (2010 p.1) "identifying the process of social enterprises whereby citizens...advance solutions to social problems". Business

growth therefore in a social enterprise is typically measured in social profit as opposed to financial profit that is the preferred growth outcome of a commercial business. In order to sustain long term survival social enterprise profit is generated through building social capital to create social value for community stakeholders. Key to this discussion is the concept of 'stakeholder' rather than 'share-holder' that is central to private sector businesses. Freeman and Reed (1983 p. 91), define a stakeholder as "any identifiable group or individual who can affect the achievement of an organisation's objectives". Doherty et al's. (2009) research argues that social enterprises must clearly reflect stakeholder interests by integrating them seamlessly into decision making. A priority for social enterprises is a robust stakeholder relationship (Owen et al., 2001) that withdraws an amount of control from the social entrepreneurial leader in decision making and transfers this to the stakeholders' building social capital during the process. Social capital is the capability of individuals to work toward a common purpose (Fukuyama, 1995) and incorporates elements that are of value to communities and provide a collective 'feel good factor'. Thompson (2002 p.415) defines social capital as the "creation of community-based tangible and intangible assets which would otherwise not exist". A study by Jack and Anderson (2002) revealed the importance of building social capital within a community through embedding local entrepreneurial contributions generating impactful community development.

Rae (2017) notes the social ethos of social enterprises in that they are principally generators of financial capital (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Dees, 2007) a portion of which is donated to support gaps in community funding that government agencies cannot support. Thompson (2002 p.427) asserts that "Organisations with a social ethos are those which are primarily creators of financial capital, a part of which is donated to social and community activities and causes". Henry (2012) argues that social sustainable organisations often re-invest financial returns, in whole or in part, back into the venture or the community. These social enterprises have a social conscience that is mirrored in how they treat their stakeholders and therefore hold tremendous promise for improving human well-being. However, social missions and financial success can be oppositional in their diverse pursuits that highlight the paradox of leading such an entity with their "contradictory, yet interrelated demands embedded in an organization's goals" (Smith 2012 p.2). This emphasises the contrast between the social (mission-driven) versus the operational (profit-driven) enterprise (Lautermann,

2013). Tian and Smith (2014) allude to the tension between social purpose and profit and how this conflict of interest can form a double-edged sword within a social enterprise.

The 2008 financial crisis exposed the capitalist business growth models (Lewis and Conaty, 2012) that aggressively exploited short-term economic and financial value to reward shareholders to the detriment of sustainable social value creation (Baumol 1990). Therefore, it is arguable that sustaining a social value in commercial businesses is increasingly recognised as a positive impact beyond the scope of economic and financial metrics. Adams (2006 p.12) developed this concept by defining sustainability as the pillars of economic growth, environmental protection and social progress claiming, “sustainability needs to be made the basis of a new understanding of human aspiration and achievement”. However, as Rae (2017 p.81) states “enterprises define sustainability in their own terms and those they deem acceptable to their consciences and communities”. Bennett and Bennett (2016) refer to a practical perspective where some social enterprises claim for governance purposes that they are ‘not for profit’ and those that prefer ‘more than profit’. Ridley-Duff and Bull (2011 p.294) argue “profit is good, because it funds social re-investment”. Moreover, Rae (2017) introduces the concept of the new era entrepreneur required to lead these businesses that can generate social value through aspects such as social justice and inclusion, community well-being, environmental awareness, and communitarianism. This perhaps is the direction of travel for all enterprises, whether commercial or social value driven.

#### 2.15.2 Community activities and enabling social SME growth.

Community activities are a type of ‘social value creation’ that SME entrepreneurial leaders may unconsciously engage in, to support their local community prosperity (refs). Exploring whether these activities occur in commercial SMEs might provide an indication of the social enabling role of commercial entrepreneurial leaders generating augmented SME growth. The study by Thompson (2002) operationalises the scope of projects that social entrepreneurial leaders may use as strategic drivers to create community value creation. He identified four central themes:

- 1) Job creation
- 2) Utilisation of buildings
- 3) Volunteer support
- 4) Focus on helping people in need linked to a clear demonstration of effectiveness

From this, a framework was developed around the activities that a social entrepreneurial leader may engage in, illustrated in Figure 2.16.

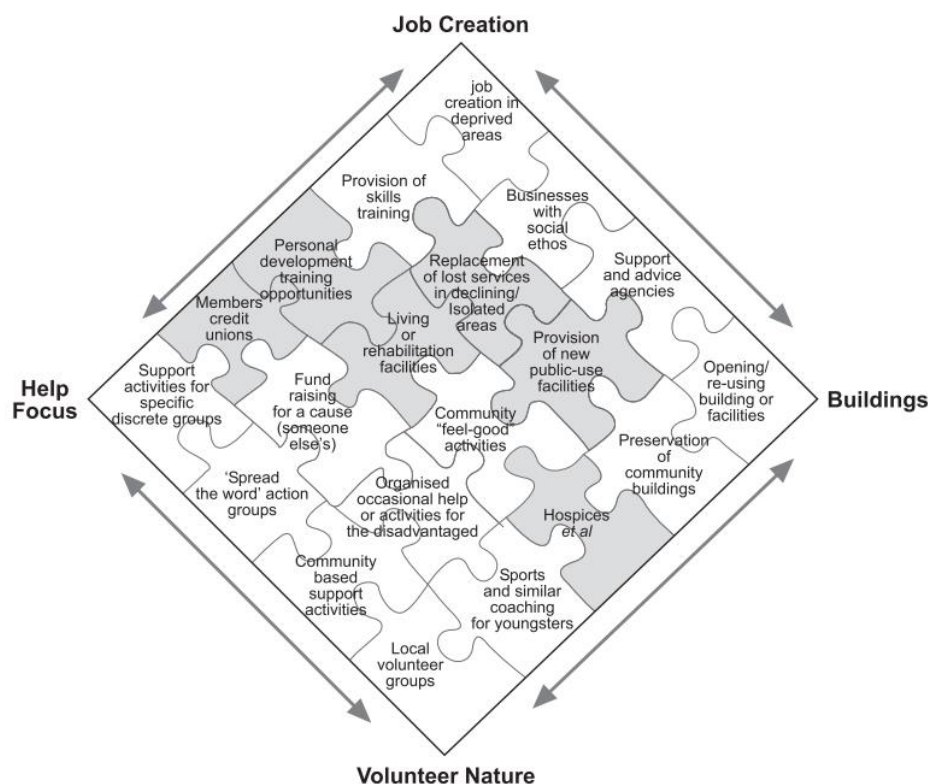


Figure 2.16 The activities of a social entrepreneur (Thompson, 2002)

Figure 2.16 illustrates a range of activities that the social entrepreneurial leader may operationalise in their commitment to wider community socio-economic development. Within each of these there may be astonishing creativity whilst others may be less ambitious but equally making marginal gains in meaningful community development. Reviewing the above categories, there are several 'social value creation' activities that SME entrepreneurial leaders with a social ethos will unconsciously engage in, influenced by a desire to contribute to their community prosperity.

For example, an SME located in a local community may have a building or premises associated with the operation. There may be times when the building is not used and could be shared with community groups for meetings. A further activity would be in replacing lost services in declining or isolated communities, like a post office or corner shop delivery service. Personal development and training opportunities both on and off the job are ways that businesses with a social ethos can engage in the community by raising the knowledge, understanding and confidence of with their workforce (Hammann et al., 2009; Delery and Doty, 1996; Berman et al., 1999; Newman et al., 2018; Pauceanu et al., 2021). It opens the SME employee to a broader view of the world, perhaps through team building activities involving an appreciation of classical art. The wider impact of employees acquiring new knowledge to give a deeper understanding of their view of the world can be transformational for employee morale in a business. The employees can richly enhance confidence and appreciation of their contribution to the economy and develop deeper relationships within a work team while doing so. Other activities that employees can get involved in are ‘feel good’ special events whereby the decision-making of the SME entrepreneurial leader is to engage employees in activities beyond the daily work tasks (street parties). Networking with local primary schools is also a means to integrate employees into the community for the greater good of communities, this can be through sponsorship of sports shirts or use of celebrity coaches for example (Jenkins, 2004; Nyuur et al., 2022). All the aforementioned activities are a means to operationalise the social ethos of SMEs, however ultimately it is the decision making and intentions of entrepreneurial leadership beyond a profitmaking mission that drives social value creation in a community in addition to economic output.

### 2.15.3 Community relations and enabling social SME growth

The literature suggests that customer and community relationships generate a bond (Cabrita and Vaz, 2008) that creates value in the business and establishes sustainable relationships that will encourage partnerships beyond the scope of the SME. Lee et al. (2001) assert that entrepreneurial leaders seek valuable economic opportunities through partnering the resource within their community networks. This accords with Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) who argue that an SME entrepreneurial leader provides the capabilities, through broad social networks, to better utilise limited resources and

reach resources from external groups. This external knowledge also provides insight for the entrepreneurial leader to enhance service delivery by continually adapting and exploiting opportunity in a spirited business environment. Pinho and Prange (2016) claim that a business knowledge base can be significantly augmented through building relational networks that can create extraordinary capabilities toward better performing SMEs from a socio-economic lens.

Murray et al., (2010) observe that social enabling is underpinned by the concept of the social economy where collaboration of active community citizens and an adoption of digital solutions can resolve community challenges more impactfully than conventional methods. Social innovation can also progressively apply new ideas and create innovative enterprise models that will generate more value beyond conventional economic models. This serves to underpin the importance of social value creation for socio-economic development in local communities. Rae (2017) asserts that social enabling is a strategic approach to influencing positive socio-economic change by linking local stakeholders including the market, local business, the employed, unemployed, volunteers, families, schools and wider communities and society.

The instrumental role of social entrepreneurial leadership in enabling social growth is increasingly significant for social impact in localities. Lyons et al. (2012) found in their research that co-creation of social growth between active community leaders and local SME entrepreneurs with a social ethos, can purposively create social growth around projects that positively impacts employees and therefore community prosperity and well-being. These cultivated community relationships demonstrate the importance of defining value in promoting community social, cultural and economic cohesion (Markley et al., 2015). It is fundamental that the social entrepreneurial leader displays their implicit values authentically when developing deep community relationships to inspire impactful social community development (Kempster and Cope, 2010).

The discussion suggests that engaging in community activities holds tremendous promise for commercial SME growth by building hybrid businesses that are commercially strong but also improve human well-being and are catalysts for impactful social community development. Nicholls (2006) stresses that the ability to combine social interest with a business approach is the hallmark of the social entrepreneurship.

Equally, the ability to generate SME growth with a primary aim of generating profit is the hallmark of the entrepreneurial leader. This includes those commercial businesses that do not grow but have a social ethos that sustains their business in the community. This gap in knowledge around a new 'hybrid' of entrepreneurial leadership will continue to steer the direction of this research.

Entrepreneurial leadership research suggests that the leader's decision-making reflects the co-creation of resources into value creating strategies (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Radulovich et al. (2018) posits that for businesses to grow the key integral resources are human capital, structural capital and relational capital as SMEs with entrepreneurial leaders have a unique ability to access external knowledge and create value in a business using these resources. For the purposes of this research the relational capital refers to the deep engagement and positive results generated between two parties (Dyer and Singh, 1998), those being the entrepreneurial leader and the SME's internal and external stakeholders in the community. This is demonstrated in the investment in time or knowledge into these relationships (Davidsson and Honig, 2003). Accordingly, relational capital seizes the worth of business relationships with the community, customers and employees and is a deeply valuable resource to sustain a business. Hsu and Wang (2012) argue that relational capital measures the value of resources pivoted through a social structure. Furthermore, Bapuji and Crossan (2005) pertain that relational capital rises when a sharing of knowledge enhances the value of a relationship because of prior connection of shared meaning, reciprocity, and commitment (Granovetter, 2005). Hence, entrepreneurial leaders will seek relationships that create value through business alliances and prior social knowledge gained from business-to-business events in their communities. Indeed, superior intangible resources may provide *sustainable* competitive advantages (Barney, 1991) and create collective but intimate service value (Radulovich et al., 2018). This is fundamental for the growth of a small business when resources and support are deficient and beyond the scope of the SME. Consequently, community networks help to tackle obstacles through partnership and reciprocal interdependencies (Tan and Meyer, 2010), that build relational resources that the SME entrepreneurial leader can use to pivot business growth in a local business environment regardless of the macro-economic factors.

Conclusively, the literature suggests the importance of social growth for successful commercial SME growth and enhancing human well-being toward impactful social community prosperity. The paradox in the socio-economic 'mission' in the current literature tends to side on a dual location of either the social entrepreneurial leader's mission of social value creation and the entrepreneurial leader's mission of a means of maximising social wealth (Zahra et al., 2009; Hynes, 2009). There appears to be a gap in theory development of entrepreneurial leadership as an individual that grows their business beyond profit maximisation and holds accountability for the duality of their business purpose (Markley et al., 2015). These SMEs may have marginal annual growth in sales but also display a strong social conscience that purposively sustains their business alongside the local community. Currently in SMEs, there is a rising willingness to demonstrate socially responsible behaviour (Morsing and Perrini, 2009) as this can have both direct and indirect impact on business performance and community prosperity. Indeed, Luetkenhorst (2004) purports that regions saturated with SMEs display parity on income generation and high social stability, indicating a 'hidden' dual strategy for SME growth. Indeed, Corporate Social Responsibility is typically associated with large corporations however Morsing and Perrini (2009 p.2) stridently claim that "SMEs are motivated, challenged and engaged in social responsibility issues in many and very different ways compared with large firms". The following section will examine the role of social responsibility and subsequently review the emergent approaches to acknowledge such social SME growth.

#### 2.15.4 Social responsibility and enabling social SME growth

Evidence of social concern from SME entrepreneurial leaders is often related to profit generation (Wilson, 1980) and Chrisman and Archer (1984) argue that socially responsible behaviour is a broader approach and seems necessary to sustain SME survival in the long-term. However, research by Hammann et al. (2009) claimed that the relationship between the SME entrepreneurial leader's social responsibility and economic value creation is facilitated through certain socially responsible practices. Given that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the known optic for measuring social growth in large corporations - it is prudent to explore other emergent thinking and practices in this domain. New principles at a macro level and subsequent practices are showing promising ways to influence entrepreneurial leaders' enablement of social



growth in SMEs. The following section explores the renowned CSR, Industry 5.0, SDGs for sustainable futures, ESGs, B-Corporations and their influence on the thinking and decisions of SME entrepreneurial leaders who generate value through social SME growth.

#### 2.15.4.1 Corporate social responsibility

The primary mission of a social entrepreneur is to generate social value through social enterprise. Santos (2009) highlights the differentiation between social enterprises generating social growth as their primary aim and commercial businesses who appropriate value to social creation through financial means like corporate social responsibility. Arguably this resides in the realms of larger SMEs who have the resources and the expected conscience to meet the social ethos of set business objectives more explicitly. Many SMEs may not have the resource or management structure to support CSR objectives and activities and therefore undermines their recognition of a social conscience. Nonetheless, the rich prevalence of commercial SMEs in any community emphasises further their 'hidden' role in significantly contributing to impactful and positive local community prosperity.

There is some certainty in the literature around the meaning of Corporate Social Responsibility (Stoian and Gilman, 2017). Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory provides understanding of stakeholder relationships, however a wider strategic perspective on CSR has emerged more recently. The European Commission (2011 p.1) have defined the concept of CSR as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society" and recommends collaborative processes with stakeholders to integrate social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns into their business model. The European Commission considers CSR to be the responsibility of commercial businesses typically housed in the 'corporate sector' however the word 'corporate' associates this with large companies. Southwell (2004) claims consensus in the literature that 'CSR' is not the most appropriate term to reflect SME engagement in community, environmental and social issues. Nevertheless, the European Commission (2011) highlights the importance of shared value between business and society and acknowledges the fact that for most SMEs the CSR process may remain informal and unmeasured. Moreover, in the last decade there has been an increasing

significance of CSR for the SME sector particularly in terms of social and environmental impacts (Puiu and Wiśniewski, 2020). Despite this, individual SME businesses receive little recognition for CSR (Spence et al., 2003), notwithstanding their dominance (99.9%) of all UK business enterprises that collectively generate essential social and environmental impact for an economy (Hammann et al., 2009).

In addition to this the motivational stress to engage in CSR for SMEs is different than for larger businesses. Large companies are summoned by government for greater accountability in their strategic CSR, in terms of risk to their reputation and brand image (Jenkins, 2004). Many SMEs do not engage in CSR projects as the costs are sometimes higher than the benefits. The number of CSR activities is a way to measure the activity, but until recently, there has been no such measure of the outcomes and impact of CSR activity in larger SMEs (Fenwick et al., 2022). Furthermore, in smaller commercial SMEs the entrepreneurial leader's issues around employee retention and business survival are at the forefront of their activities. Indeed, 60% of SMEs are simply content to survive (Baker, 2003). Provided SMEs are making a good living and protecting a personal ethic, as also discussed previously, they are satisfied to merely sustain (Graafland, 2003; Anderson and Ullah, 2014). There is therefore no reason for them to reduce the bottom line with CSR related schemes. Indeed, Spence and Rutherford (2000) in Table 2.8 propose four frames of perceiving the social perspectives of the SME – profit maximisation priority, subsistence priority, enlightened self-interest, and social priority.

SME social perspective frames	Description
Profit maximisation priority	The drive for maximising profit is the company's top priority
Subsistence priority	Long-term survival through ensuring security of livelihood; maintenance of a certain standard of living
Enlightened self-interest priority	Active in social issues with the conscious awareness of the positive influence that the owner-manager perceives this will have on their business
Social priority	Social values and actions are integrated into the business life and take priority over maximising profit

Table 2.8 The four social perspective frames of SMEs. Source: Spence and Rutherford (2000)

In spite of this, there are also entrepreneurial leaders who understand the long-term benefits of social responsibility challenging the perception of entrepreneurial leaders

as profit maximizing and rationally economic in their drive for success (Spence and Rutherford, 2000).

The prevalence of SMEs in a growing economy account for their crucial role in generating social and economic impact within local communities (Medina-Munoz 2001; Perrini 2006). Improvement to SME business economic performance can be linked to the competitive advantage that CSR activities can create. Stoian and Gilman (2017) purport that aligning CSR activities to the competitive strategy of the business can enhance SME growth through more efficient use of limited resources and thus enhance their performance. Moreover, it is critical to know exactly which activities enhance firm growth through the integration of the community and the business, so they become “mutually reinforcing” (Porter and Kramer, 2006 p. 92).

Furthermore, SMEs that adopt a CSR approach share value with society (Porter and Kramer, 2006) and prioritise the stakeholders that can influence social capital and enhance SME growth (Russo and Perrini 2009; Van Beurden and Gossling 2008). Some scholars argue that CSR is a factor and an outcome of high financial performance (Orlitzky 2005; Orlitzky, et al., 2003) and others have found that CSR has a direct impact on the SME performance (Kapoor and Sandhu, 2010; Mishra and Suar, 2010; van Beurden and Gossling, 2008). Finally, Stoian and Gilman (2017) reveal from their research that CSR brings benefit directly related to the community such as creating jobs for residents, supporting employee giving, employee volunteering and philanthropic activities. They also argue that whilst previous research centered on CSR activities and community involvement (Jenkins 2009; Mishra and Suar, 2010; Niehm et al., 2008; Perrini 2006), their findings also evidence that CSR activities positively impact sales growth regardless of the SME competitive strategy.

Commercial SMEs have a responsibility for social growth and impact regardless of size, to create a good working environment where diversity is welcomed, their community is engaged in reciprocal benefits and there is a deep respect for environmental protection. Sen (2011) reviewed the literature and identified a plethora of SME advantages for entrepreneurial leaders to engage in social responsibility. These include long term survival, business profitability, community support, reputation, morality, ethical reputation, differentiation, and brand image. Cochius (2006) conducted research on the motivations of social responsibility in Dutch SMEs and

identified from these activities four target stakeholder groups for SMEs engaging in such activities. These are employees, market/customers, community (education and health) and the environment. The BIS (2010) identified SME social responsibility activities that generate social growth whereby for example an employer supports employee giving and volunteering, sound staff recruitment and development, upholds work-life balance, and a culture of trust. Additional activities identified include where employers provide fair and equitable wage and implement non-discriminatory practices. Pauceanu et al. (2021) claim “among the benefits of entrepreneurial leadership is its capability to increase the voluntary actions of employees, and it increases their engagement and motivation”. For the consumers, activities included educating on buying the right products whilst providing responsive and fair after service. In addition, activities such as the environment, using resources more efficiently and recycling/producing less waste were included (Esmer and Faruk, 2017). The golden thread within all these four activities is the essence of social growth that impacts positively on the local community. To evidence this social growth Bird et al. (2012) argue that these activities can be measured facilitating a quantitative investigation of their impact on SME socio-economic growth.

Critically, an assumption in the CSR literature for SMEs is that they are “little big companies” (Tilley, 2000) and that CSR can merely be downsized to fit SMEs. It could be suggested that the removal of the word “corporate” and the simplification of the term to focus on the practicalities of implementing ‘social responsibility’ using terms from everyday life, would improve understanding. Furthermore, large companies have the time, resources and employee structure to invest in CSR activities to achieve the associated positive social outcomes (Camilleri, 2012). For example, CSR activities related to workforce such as flexi working to accommodate childcare is very difficult for an SME as this puts pressure on limited resources and does not contribute to competitive advantage and potentially business growth.

Perrini et al. (2007) compared CSR strategies in big companies and SMEs, and they concluded that CSR is more important in the former as they have more resources and knowledge. A study by Balluchi and Furlotti (2013) revealed that many SMEs are unaware of the environmental impact they have on the community. Indeed, their research revealed that 49% of SMEs in Italy believe they do not implement any environmental initiatives and 89% believe they do not support CSR activities.

The obstacles for CSR by SMEs are primarily around the costs involved in creating CSR activities, even though research shows that CSR increases SME profitability in the long term and leads to the success of the business. A study conducted by Puiu and Wiśniewski (2020) discovered that the reason why SMEs did not engage in CSR because they believed that there was no demand in the community, an unusual outcome as there is always a need to enhance the community prosperity. Yu (2010) also completed a study in SMEs in Sweden who identified the reason SMEs did not engage in CSR was a combination of human and financial resource constraints and minor positive impact reported by stakeholders in the community. Anca et al. (2011) argue that there is a lack of knowledge in commercial SMEs about what CSR actually means. In many cases SMEs create social value through various activities but neither understand nor know that many of their activities constitute social responsibility. The research also revealed that neither the SME leader or their local media knew that they engaged in social growth activities with their community and therefore the social growth impact remains 'hidden' and unmeasured.

One of the challenges of SMEs is that their social responsibility function can be hidden under different functions (Knopf and Mayer-Scholl, 2013) and therefore difficult to identify and measure. There is also a flawed perception that social responsibility should be adapted to the size of the company and that SMEs mainly invest in social and environmental projects that are considered unrelated with their business, however these activities are focused on employees who primarily live in the community. Only three companies, out of 26 reported on any aspect of their social responsibility and none reported annually (Knopf and Mayer-Scholl, 2013). Companies cited measuring and quantifying social responsibility as a big challenge but recognised the need to do this if their approach was to become more systematic. Many companies were somewhat cynical of being asked to demonstrate their social responsibility credentials by customer companies as it was perceived that they only did so as part of a particular system, not through any CSR of their own i.e., a "box-ticking exercise" (Jenkins, 2006) and that stakeholder companies should improve their social responsibility before asking SMEs to demonstrate their own.

Puiu and Wiśniewski (2020) conducted research and concluded that SMEs are socially responsible, however they do not use the term CSR and, in many cases, they do not even know what CSR is, using terms such as "do something good", "common

sense”, “to do something in return” (Puiu and Wiśniewski, 2020 p.33). Furthermore, in the research by Jenkins (2004) the majority of SMEs use moral and ethical arguments to justify why social responsibility was important to them. Companies spoke of it being the “right thing to do, pride, feeling good, everybody has a responsibility to do what they can, self-worth, integrity, well-being, and satisfaction” (Jenkins, 2004 p.28). Jenkins (2004) argues that some benefits of SME social responsibility are quantifiable, however, most are soft or intangible benefits and unmeasurable. Indeed, evidencing and measuring social responsibility is a genuine challenge for SMEs.

For this research, it is believed that social growth in a more socially conscious business environment, is implicit in every day decision making by commercial entrepreneurial leaders. CSR is the nominal reference point recognised by policy makers and therefore can be measured by those SMEs that are big enough to resource it and deny ticking the CSR box. For smaller commercial SMEs who do not have the time or resource it is argued that CSR could be replaced by the term social responsibility in SMEs. Social responsibility activity is not explicit in SMEs but is integrated into the SME leaders living everyday business values and translates into just the way we do things mutually for their employees and the local community. Often this social value remains hidden from the measuring instruments of policy makers and governments who have yet to appreciate the combined augmented growth value enabled by socially responsible SME entrepreneurial leaders. However, measuring the socially responsible impact for reporting purposes has always been a challenge for both commercial and social enterprises, as it appears to be easy to identify but measurement continues to be challenging.

#### 2.15.4.2 Industry 5.0

Interestingly, there appears to be an emerging change in the importance of societal impact and the value this serves in business and wider society. Following the first three industrial revolutions, the fourth industrial revolution promised noteworthy economic and social opportunities through real time communication, collaboration, and co-operation in manufacturing products to transform society (Manda and Dhaou, 2019). The 5<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution goes further on societal wellbeing and is encompassed in the concept of Industry 5.0 (Xu et al., 2021). Industry 5.0 shows increasing interest in

core values of human-centricity, sustainability and resilience supported by recent government policy (Paris Agreement, 2015; United Nations SDGs 2015; Llana-Nozal, 2019; The economy of well-being; OECD Better Life Index, 2021; The Better Business Act, 2021). Hence Industry 5.0 recognises how business and commerce can achieve social impact beyond jobs and become a robust provider of community prosperity. Moreover, it is believed that production will respect the planet and focus human wellbeing at the centre of the process (Xu et al., 2021). The advent of Industry 5.0 driven by technological innovation requires industry to reshape their thinking on both its role and position in society (Zhong, 2017). The sense of direction and core values of Industry 5.0 is a shift toward an approach that centres on civic society. The perception of employees will be more about an investment as opposed to a cost and technology will serve societies to embrace diversity and inclusivity (Lu et al., 2021). The work environment will prioritise physical, mental health and wellbeing encouraging employee upskilling and reskilling to safeguard a strong work-life balance (Breque, et al., 2021). For industry to uphold the human centric approach it must be sustainable and engage in circular processes to sustain natural resources through reuse, recycle and repurposing of natural resources. It must also reduce environmental impact, waste, and contribute to the creation of an efficient and effective circular economy (Breque et al., 2021). Consequently, research into entrepreneurial leadership theory in SMEs (Harrison, 2018) as more than a profit driven endeavour is aligned to the adjustments to leadership thinking at macro-economic and social levels.

#### 2.15.4.3 Sustainable development goals and the circular economy

The circular economy has been defined as an economic system that promotes sustainability in SMEs and supports the shift in thinking from linear to a circular economy (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Kirchherr et al., 2017; Prieto-Sandoval et al., 2018) advocating for sustainable economic futures (Khanra et al., 2021; Lieder and Rashid, 2016; Reike et al., 2018). The circular economy system aims to minimise omissions (Chizaryfard et al., 2020) and drive innovation to promote environmental issues and raise awareness of sustainable consumption (Pontoni and Bruschi, 2018).

The intensity of SMEs in a region plays an important role in embedding circular economy practices into their systems for economic growth. Indeed, entrepreneurial

leaders of SMEs that are orientated to sustainability embrace innovative practices for their survival and sustainable growth (Zhu et al., 2022). However, research shows there are barriers and challenges for SMEs to implement sustainability practices (Mura et al., 2020; Ormazabal et al., 2018) however the benefits outweigh the costs (Patwa et al., 2021; Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2020). In addition, whilst there has been a lack of research in SMEs embracing sustainability, there have been reports of strong business continuity, improved performance, and increased customer retention. SME leaders could be in a noteworthy position to promote positive environmental sustainability and are key interpreters of how SMEs respond to environmental challenges (Metcalf and Benn, 2013). Indeed, SME leadership of sustainability is a shared responsibility between internal and external stakeholders planning for long term sustainable futures (McCann and Sweet, 2014; Timmer et al., 2014).

The global trend in environmental and sustainability issues has also been influenced by the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. The SDGs are a call to action for business, communities, and governments to realign the relationship between the economy, environment and society (Smith et al., 2022). Seventeen goals were agreed by world leaders in 2015 (United Nations, 2015) and are a guideline for SMEs embedding sustainability practices (Van Zanten and Van Tulder, 2021). Many SMEs have unique strengths in pursuing SDGs through innovation, skills and resources (Kramer and Porter, 2011; Di Vaio, et al., 2021). As singular entities SMEs have a small and limited economic, social, and environmental impact and de Sousa Jabbour et al. (2020, p.1) claim they are different from larger businesses because of their “fighting mentality, resource limitations, informal strategies, and flexible structures”. Nevertheless, their impact on society is significant if they are measured collectively (Crick and Crick, 2021) and can even exceed that of large business.

Furthermore, research by Smith et al. (2022) showed that SMEs interpret sustainability in terms of meeting the needs of their communities, despite the fact they feel detached from SDGs (Discua Cruz, 2020) and use them only as a guide for action, value creation (Freudenreich et al., 2020) and a reference point for decision making in areas of importance to humanity (Acuti et al., 2020). Hence, the relationship that SMEs have with their local communities’ constructs SMEs as spaces for engagement within their



community. The smaller size of an SME also makes them more agile to economic and social changes (Forbes, 2012) and facilitates a more direct relationship with stakeholders including a deeper bond with employees and the community motivating more socially responsible behaviour. Indeed, collaborating with stakeholders and their communities, SMEs can help to pursue sustainability goals (Vrontis et al., 2020; Tsolakis et al., 2021) and implement sustainability practices. Furthermore, important sustainability orientated SME entrepreneurial leaders perceive “educating individuals” and “neighbourliness” as the most important part of their perception of sustainability (Smith et al., 2022 p.117). Regardless of this, SMEs are prone to endure the burden of smallness and scarcity of resources that can hinder their capacity to meet the expectations of SDGs 2030. From an SME entrepreneurial leader perspective and in meeting the sustainability needs of the local community, a decentralised approach through local council policy could be more recognisable than global SDGs to embed environmental (Handrito et al., 2021) and sustainable practices for sustainable socio-economic futures.

#### 2.15.4.4 Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) and B Corporations

The crisis of the pandemic in 2020 raised many questions as regards SMEs. Particularly about purpose and whether the purpose of an SME is to make money or do SMEs also have a broader role in social responsibility to make the world a better place for all. Traditionally, shareholder primacy was key to maximising return on investment and more recently the movement toward stakeholder primacy through a holistic approach has become much more significant (Barbagila et al., 2021). The messages from the global socio-economic environment are clear, business strategies must include environmental and social factors grounded in good governance (Fenwick et al., 2022).

Environmental and Social Governance indicators (ESGs) were developed from the previously known concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). However, there is little or no discussion about ESG strategies or reporting for SMEs and how these could support SMEs to do business and survive in a disruptive yet socially conscious and relevant business world. The environmental criteria in ESGs pertain to the key elements around ‘green’ issues in an SME’s strategic plan and can be a useful

compass for SMEs. The social element of ESGs refers to the relationships within the community the SME is situated, typically encircling human rights and ways to reduce poverty (Henisz, 2019). Furthermore, this also aligns with the importance of human capital focusing on employee development, access to healthcare, communication, finance and nutrition.

Moving away from the profit ideology, in 1994 the triple bottom line became a fundamental principle adopted by economists and academics. Suddenly, 'People, Planet and Profit' became the new measuring tool for investment and leaders had to manage business in such a way that it improved the lives of people with relevance to the planet. This concurs with ESG strategies that must be lived and valued by employees, customers and stakeholders being global citizens where it is more than giving back, it is about building communities with innovative products and services.

Even though ESG reporting can measure value in social responsibility (Segal, 2021) it is important to differentiate between those SMEs that look good as opposed to being good. ESGs have received scrutiny as simply being a marketing tool in response to showing a more responsible business approach and companies often use ESG-statements in reaction to the growing societal and political pressure to be more responsible. Another challenge with ESGs is that of measuring compliance as measuring profit is a much easier task. Nevertheless, the relevance of only measuring profit is diminishing as a tool to measure progress with more focus on the value attributed by SMEs. At the end of the day, ESGs are a value creator (Kathpalia, Business Times, 2022), however ways of reporting SME social growth in value performance are not a policy requirement in at least the G20 countries (Barbagila et al., 2019). Indeed, a European Directive is providing opportunities for SMEs to report on non-financial matters (Riva et al., 2021) and does highlight a gap in policy. Further limitations for SMEs reporting on ESGs are their human and financial resource constraints even though they have the advantage of agility and faster decision making over larger businesses. Consideration at this stage is that it would be no more arduous than tax reporting and the benefits from positive performance, investment and incentive opportunities may encourage reporting by SME entrepreneurial leaders.

Certified B Corporations (B Corps), are certified businesses based on their value creation initiatives for the non-shareholding stakeholders, balancing People, Planet and Profit, known as the Triple Bottom Line (Kassoy et al., 2016). This is because of the increasing requirement of SMEs to report on social and environmental performance to overcome a growing mistrust in capitalism (Deloitte 2020; Hanbury Strategy, 2020) and tackle negative environmental and social issues (Conger et al., 2018). There are multiple benefits for SMEs upholding sound environmental and social performance including financial cost reductions, customer loyalty, reputation and enhanced employee retention and recruitment (Mazzi, 2020; Shields and Shelleman, 2017). Indeed almost 5,000 global companies report on their non-financial performance (KPMG, 2017).

In accord with the reporting evolution, B Corps have established robust standards of assessment for sustainability, primarily in SMEs (Kim et al., 2016; Stubbs, 2017) with measurements in employee wellbeing, environmental impact, community engagement and customers. The B Corps is a certification scheme, designed by an NGO called B Lab (2006) and is a measurement standard for environmental and social performance, transparency, and accountability (Honeyman and Jana, 2019) that is winning worldwide acclaim (Paelman et al., 2021). The B Corps certification supports business in implementing sustainable practices and their social values (B lab, 2020). The differentiation of B Corps over traditional SMEs is that social and environmental purposes are the centre of their business activities whilst pursuing economic success (Stubbs, 2017) and preserving stakeholder interests (Carvalho et al., 2022). Indeed, Zhu et al. (2022) argue that B Corps are certified based on their value creation for non-shareholding stakeholders and are cognisant of balancing profit with people and the planet. Paelman et al., (2021) claim that B Corps experience higher turnover growth than non-certified SMEs. The movement advocates for legal and regulatory innovations to nurture entrepreneurial eco-systems to enable sustainable start up SMEs.

However, there is some confusion and competition appearing around reporting mechanisms. Research by Moroz et al. (2018) found 500 NGOs partaking in audit and certification of social endorsing businesses and Ecolabel Index have listed 455 ecolabels (Ecolabel Index, 2021). B Corps however have managed to be regarded as

a thorough tool to entirely evaluate social and environmental performance in a way that is transparent and accountable. Arguably, the B Corps approach uses the Triple Bottom Line in a unique way where consideration for the environmental and social value is equally important to the financial bottom line (Isil and Hernke, 2017). Furthermore, they balance purpose with profit by achieving the “the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance with legal accountability” (B Corporation, 2021) and stand out from the “greenwash revolution” (Kim and Schifeling, 2016 p.32; Liute and Giacomo, 2022). In 2020 there was a significant growth in the B Corps “movement” (Stubbs, 2017 p.339) which has been called “one of the most important movements of our time” (B corporation UK, 2020) and is “transforming entrepreneurial practice” (Moroz et al., 2018 p.125). Arguably B Corps are perceived to be a nuanced business model where profit is measured in value created in social and environmental impact (Stubbs, 2017). To further this the B Corporation ‘movement’ is also a community of business practice (Diez-Busto et al., 2021; Kirst et al., 2021; Stubbs, 2017) facilitating peer to peer learning and knowledge sharing with collective commitments around declarations of achieving net zero through a Triple Bottom Line approach. Scholars also denote that the model contributes to the authenticity of sustainability metrics (Dorfleitner et al., 2015; Semenova and Hassel, 2015; Widyawati, 2020).

Nevertheless, there are limitations to B Corporation Certification knowing the lack of resources in SMEs that can stifle sustainability strategies (Sloan et al., 2013), and the perception of SME entrepreneurial leaders that environmental protection is the priority over a broader approach including social and economic objectives (Klewitz and Hansen, 2014). Furthermore, many certified B Corporations already are part of the movement, and the certification does not necessarily encourage SMEs to improve their positive social and environmental impact (Conger et al., 2018; Villela et al., 2021). Practically SMEs also enquire whether the B Corps approach is feasible and can realistically be achieved (Srivastava et al., 2021).

In summary, improving social, environmental, and economic performance simultaneously appears to create a win-win for SMEs direct and indirect shareholders, stakeholders, the economy, communities, and wider society. Therefore, the policy requirements for SME reporting on environmental, social, and economic performance

at an appropriate governance level is relevant and subsequently needs consideration sooner rather than later. SMEs adopting a TBL stakeholder approach through ESGs or B Corps may not yet be profitable but in the future may provide significant profit and social value. Nevertheless, measuring social impact for reporting purposes seems to remain a challenge for both commercial and social SMEs. Consequently, whilst social contribution in SMEs appears easy to identify, measurement continues to be challenging.

#### 2.15.5 Challenges of measuring SME social growth

In the early 1980's extensive research by Davisson and Wiklund (2013) reviewed and critiqued the literature on business growth motivated by a lack of research around the concept. This also highlighted the challenges of measuring SME growth when not necessarily driven by traditional metrics. Measuring value of SME growth beyond economic and measurable indicators can be challenging and one of the main reasons why academics and practitioners have avoided the subject. Having discussed in section 2.13.4, the meaning of business growth, it is useful to explore and explain the challenges of measuring SME growth. It also draws attention to the lack of measurement around the positive societal impact that these small businesses can bring into their community prosperity and wellbeing.

Commercial businesses are part of society and contribute to many community activities for the greater good of society as a whole. Investors, funders, and policy makers are attracted to businesses that utilise their resources efficiently and effectively enabling foresight for socio-economic return (Lyon and Owen, 2019). In commercial SME businesses, success is measured by capturing the value created by product and services (Mongelli and Rullani, 2017) around the architecture of revenues, costs and profits associated with the delivery of economic value (Foss and Saebi, 2017). However, despite this enthusiasm, measuring social impact of a commercial business is troublesome for policy makers as they cannot agree on what it is or how to assess it - the social impact of a commercial business may be clear to see but difficult to measure. Nevertheless, understanding the positive social value a business serves to society is critical for community prosperity and local citizens well-being. To understand

at a deeper level how social value is measured in social enterprises helps to consider how hidden social growth can be measured in commercial SMEs.

Over recent decades there have been many attempts by scholars and business analysts to measure social growth within social enterprises where the primary activity is to generate social prosperity in the local community. Moreover, over the last 40 years there have been attempts from many sources to calculate social value (Mulgan, 2010). This has led to fragmented and ambiguous literature demonstrating the frustrations of measuring social impact from either social or commercial enterprises. Whilst numerous definitions of social impact measurement have been attempted, no universally accepted definition has been agreed (Mulgan, 2010; Costa and Pesci, 2016; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie, 2016). One such attempt is that of Perrini and Vurro (2013) who argued that social impact is the ability of social entrepreneurial leaders to change the status quo within a given area of intervention.

The result of many attempted definitions and measurements of social impact have concluded that specific indicators are typically used based on specific enterprises, reflecting the heterogeneous characteristics of social and commercial enterprises. The current complexity in attempting to select the best method to measure social value or growth explains why such controversy exists in the field (Maas and Liket, 2011; Perrini and Vurro, 2013; Bengo et al., 2015) and that a golden standard applicable to all social enterprises is inconceivable (Costa and Pesci, 2016). Therefore, finding the right tool to measure social growth is paramount for SMEs to enhance their legitimacy and obtain external sources of resources if required (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie, 2016).

A study by Clark et al. (2004) classified social impact as activities, outputs, and outcomes. Activities are the interventions implemented by the business to improve community livelihoods. Outputs are the results of activities that are quantifiable, outcomes are the legacy of output impact on a community's livelihood, prosperity, and well-being. Perrini et al. (2021) also suggests that measuring social impact is effective when it is simple, useful, certain, natural, understood, accepted, transparent and evidence based. A useful measurement should be able to explain the generation of the change and provide evidence for investors and stakeholders of the SMEs intention (Rizzi et al., 2018).

Given the challenge of finding a measure of social growth clearly ‘one size does not fit all’ (Grieco, 2015) and finding the best approach for specific interests is paramount. Given that confusion is central to enabling an approach, the inference of discouraging the measurement process at all may deny a potentially valuable measure of business growth beyond financial outputs. Perrini et al. (2021) argues that the evaluation of social growth within SMEs deserves greater attention as otherwise the real impact on community prosperity is lost.

Figure 2.4 has guided the literature review in entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth and leads to the emergence of a conceptual framework that presents the core of the thesis. The thesis proposes conceptually that entrepreneurial leaders potentially generate both economic and social SME growth, referred to in this research as ‘augmented’ SME growth. The following section (2.15) explains the conceptual framework, aligned to the components presented in the literature review.

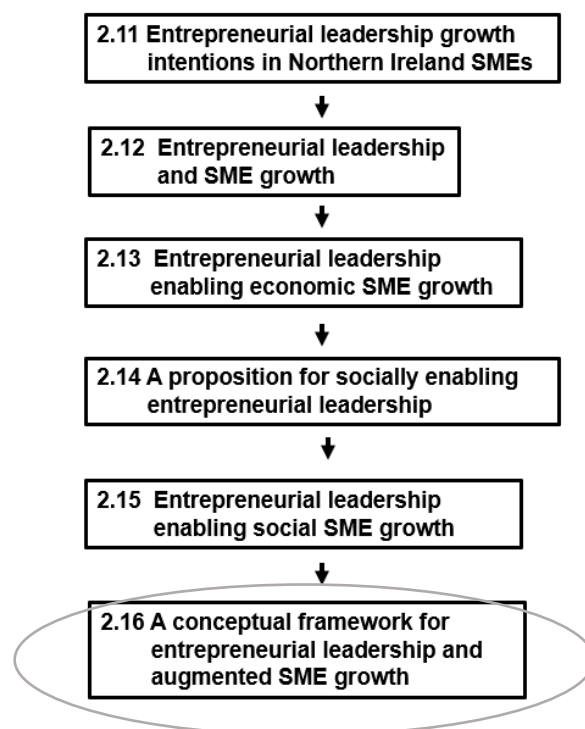


Figure 2.4 Structure of second stage literature review leading to a conceptual Framework for entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth

## 2.16 A conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership & a definition of augmented SME Growth

As a reminder, the overall aim of this study is to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs. Figure 2.17 presents a conceptual framework aligned to the literature review that critiques the existing theories of leadership, entrepreneurship, and SME growth, indicating the research gap and demand for empirical research.

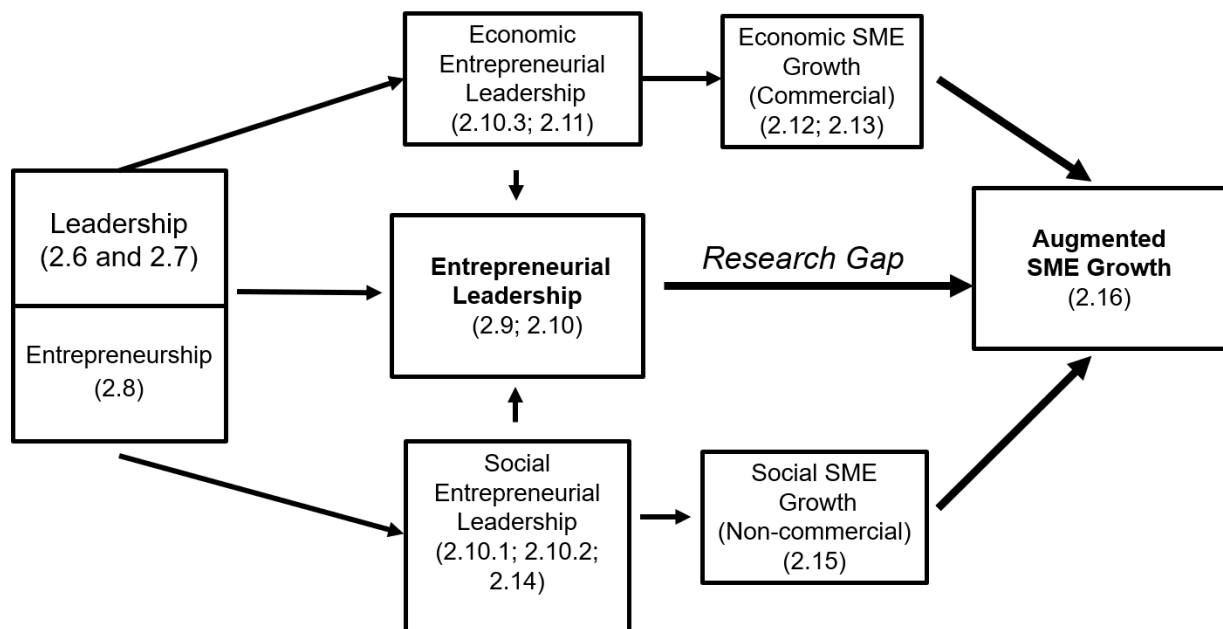


Figure 2.17 The conceptual framework aligned to the literature review

Beginning at the left-hand side of the Figure 2.17, the literature review began with a comprehensive investigation into the evolution of leadership (2.6) that extended to review the leadership theory associated with enabling social SME growth value (2.7), where entrepreneurial leadership theory appears to be limited. The subsequent theories discussed have evolved from the more traditional, socially enabling leadership theory, namely servant (2.7.1) and ethical leadership (2.7.2) to more recent theories in authentic leadership (2.7.3).



Thereafter, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the most recent entrepreneurial leadership theory the evolution of entrepreneurship was considered (2.8) converging (2.9) to form entrepreneurial leadership. The evolution of entrepreneurial leadership (2.10) led to a discussion on entrepreneurial leadership with social enabling intentions (2.10.1). Naturally this then led to a review of entrepreneurial leadership and social responsibility (2.10.2). Thereafter the more familiar economically enabling entrepreneurial leadership (2.10.3; 2.11) is examined along with the established associations with SME growth. For contextualisation, it was necessary to introduce the literature on SME growth (2.12), beginning with a definition of the SME (2.12.1) and then examining the established priority growth measures for SME growth (2.12.2). Following this, SME growth research in the UK was reviewed (2.12.3) followed by a review of the Northern Ireland SME growth research (2.12.4).

The literature review then reviewed the common assumptions of entrepreneurial leadership enabling economic SME growth (2.13). This firstly looked at the importance of enabling economic SME growth as an entrepreneurial leader, followed by a review of the literature on the obstacles to economic growth (2.13.2) as presented to entrepreneurial leaders that lead to examining the primary intentions for enabling economic growth (2.13.3). The literature on the meaning of SME growth to entrepreneurial leaders is then reviewed revealing the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the concept (2.13.4). The dialogue then leads to a proposition that exposes the social intentions of the entrepreneurial leader in SMEs (2.14). Following on, the literature then explores where entrepreneurial leadership may enable social SME growth (2.15) leading to a discussion on the importance of this (2.15.1) and how this is operationalised in SMEs (2.15.2). It then explores the importance of building community relationships that enable social growth in SMEs (2.15.3) and how social responsibility intentions enables social SME growth (2.15.4). Finally, the challenge of measuring social SME growth is examined (2.15.5).

Drawing together all the elements of the literature review that relate to each element of the conceptual framework, a research gap is evidence in the economically enabling entrepreneurial leadership literature (Storey, 1994; Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Hermans et al., 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Hauser et al., 2020). In addition, the synthesis

of the elements on the socially enabling SME growth illuminates a research gap in the literature beyond the measurable economic metrics (Penrose 1959, Davidson and Wiklund 2013; Davidsson et al., 2022; Gherhes et al., 2016; Gebauer, 2023). Therefore, the convergence of the two pathways identified in the conceptual framework reveals the 'research gap' to explore empirically the intentions and behaviours (independent variable) of entrepreneurial leaders in generating 'augmented' SME growth (dependent variable).

Critically reviewing the literature enlightened the evolution of leadership, concluding that in relation to SME growth, the theory of 'entrepreneurial leadership' may be insufficient. From prior literature, it is suggested that current definitions of entrepreneurial leadership are limited (Penrose 1959, Davidson and Wiklund 2013; Davidsson et al., 2022; Gherhes et al., 2016; Gebauer, 2023) since they focus solely on the economic intentions and behaviours of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs. Davidsson et al. (2022) and Davidsson and Wiklund (2013) call for entrepreneurial leadership research that focus on the "value" (p.56) generated in small business growth, which should go beyond amounts. Reviewing the extant literature on socially enabling leadership also identified the need to explore entrepreneurial leadership that extends beyond the focus of economic SME growth (McQuade et al., 2021; Sharif and Scandura, 2014; Widayani, et al., 2020; Aishah et al., 2020; Sarmawa et al., 2020). Consequently, from this critical review of literature, it is identified that current studies largely focus on how entrepreneurial leadership solely enable economic SME growth but fails to recognise the role which entrepreneurial leadership has for the enablement of social growth in SMEs.

Using the concept of augmented SME growth (defined in section 1.3) supports the call for this empirical research to evidence that the entrepreneurial leader in today's SME enables economic and social SME growth. Moreover, the conceptual framework assists in operationalising this empirical research to establish the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth through the intentions, decisions, and subsequent actions of socially enabling entrepreneurial leaders. It is proposed that implementation of the conceptual framework using empirical data will sufficiently evidence the socially enabling entrepreneurial leader and serve to enhance the theory of entrepreneurial leadership.

In summary, the core contribution of the thesis conceptualises a 'nuanced' entrepreneurial leadership encompassing their contribution to augmented growth in SMEs. Arguably such leadership may deliver higher levels of economic growth alongside social growth additionally providing a refreshed understanding of SME growth. The empirical research indicates that augmented SME growth is enabled through a symbiotic relationship with economic and socially enabling entrepreneurial leaders. Evidencing the generation of augmented SME growth highlights the contribution of the thesis to the theory of entrepreneurial leadership. To strengthen the research findings a robust and rigorous methodology was required to explore the research question and achieve the research aim as an explanatory investigation into the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This research explores the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth. Augmented SME growth is proposed as a more appropriate understanding of SME growth acknowledging both the economic and social contribution of SMEs, arguably providing more holistic approach. Moreover, the concept recognises entrepreneurial leaders as critical catalysts in generating commercial outputs whilst also contributing to local community prosperity and well-being. This indicates a research gap in both the entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth theory, requiring further research, to exploring the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generations of augmented SME growth.

Researching entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in SMEs is complex and a plethora of methods could be used to gather empirical data. Each individual method selected has their own specific collection instruments, arguably providing the most reliable results coupled with associated limitations. Characteristically, methods that collect large amounts of quantitative statistical data provide opportunity to find associations and correlations. In contrast, there is a rationale for methods used to explore individual intentions, thoughts, and perceptions on a relatively smaller qualitative scale. Whatever the approach selected, it is critical that the methodology corresponds to exploring the research question to attain the research aim. Since entrepreneurial leaders are social actors and the independent variable within the research question and SME growth is typically determined through quantitative means, a mixed methods approach is utilised for this research.

### 3.2 Chapter structure

This chapter explains the research philosophy and approach to theory development for this study. It then progresses to substantiate the rationale for a mixed methods approach for researching the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. The research design and strategy are then discussed, detailing an overview of the quantitative and qualitative research methods

used. Finally, the data analysis process is explained, followed by consideration of ethical issues, data instruments, procedures, and management.

### 3.3 Research philosophy

A research philosophy is defined by Collis and Hussey (2021) as the world view of the researcher on the nature and validity of acquiring knowledge relevant to the area being explored. The importance of a philosophy in research cannot be overstated as this delineates fundamentally different ways of seeing the world and carrying out research. Consequently, the researcher's philosophy guides their beliefs and actions harvesting the knowledge generated. There is much debate between scientists and philosophers on the acceptable pathways to acquire knowledge. It is intended that the assumptions for this research will be clarified and constitute a credible research philosophy which will underpin the methodological choice, research strategy, data collection and analysis.

Positivism is a paradigm that serves an objective position, accepts that research is unbiased by the researcher and contests any contamination of the researcher's values (Saunders et al., 2019). It has a scientific approach and accepts only that reality is entirely based on factual research. It is unconnected to any internal views of the world and any explanation is presented objectively. Consequently, positivists neglect any subjectivity from the research data collected and believe that the avoidance of any subjective data is the only way to gain valid and reliable data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Alternatively, interpretivism as a research philosophy is explicitly subjectivist and has a focus on multiple interpretations complexity and meaning making (Saunders et al., 2019). Fundamentally the interpretivists' axiology pertains to the reasoning that their interpretation of research data collected relies on their own values and beliefs that take an empathetic position to the outcomes of discussions from social interaction. The interpretivist struggles to see the world view of the participant as the researcher's own values and experiences may blur the reality that exists.

Given the research question, aim and objectives, it was identified that the most appropriate philosophical research approach for this study is pragmatism. Pragmatism as a paradigm seeks to reconcile the objectivism (positivist facts) and the subjectivism (interpretivism values) to produce a rigour of knowledge sourced from different experiences of social actors (Saunders et al., 2019). It is thought and action focused in considering theories, hypotheses and research findings within specific consequences that serves to create pragmatic meaning that enables action. The pragmatist as a researcher accepts multiple realities and there is not one single point of view that contributes to their reflexive nature when using methods that enable relevant, reliable, and credible data that progress the research area (Kelemen and Rumens, 2008). Table 3.1 illustrates the understandings of these primary though opposing paradigms and how they build knowledge and understanding (Bloomberg et al., 2014 p.19).

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>	<b>Pragmatism</b>
<b><i>View of the world</i></b>	The world is external and objective.	The world is socially constructed and subjective.	The world is both objective, socially structured and subjective. Supports real world practical application
<b><i>Involvement of Researcher</i></b>	Researcher is independent.	Researcher is part of what is observed and sometimes even actively collaborates.	Research is independent and part of what is observed.
<b><i>Researcher's influence</i></b>	Research is value-free.	Research is driven by human interest.	Research is independent (value

			free) and driven by human interest (bias).
<b><i>What is observed?</i></b>	Objective, often quantitative, facts.	Subjective interpretations of meanings.	Objective (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative).
<b><i>How is knowledge developed?</i></b>	Reducing phenomena to simple elements representing general laws.	Taking a broad and total view of phenomena to detect explanations beyond the current knowledge.	Evaluates beliefs or theories for practical application.

Table 3.1 The primary but conflicting paradigms to build knowledge and understanding. Source: Adapted from Bloomberg et al. (2014)

For pragmatism, a theory is true only if it works, particularly in promoting equity, freedom, justice and generates practical consequences for society. Hence pragmatists focus not on whether a proposition fits an ontology, but whether it suits a purpose and creates action (Rorty, 1998). A paradigm is a set of basic internalised assumptions that underwrite the frame of reference, mode of theorising and ways of working in which a researcher operates. Since the 1970's the pragmatism paradigm has regained popularity largely because of the insights it has provided for research into management and organisations and because it is seen by some people to provide epistemological justification for mixing approaches and methods (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Hence pragmatism views the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study not only as legitimate but in some cases necessary (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020).

The pragmatist approach is well suited to mixed methods given the ontological pluralism underpinning the philosophy of this research and as Morgan (2007 p.60) concedes, “the pragmatic approach can address several metaphysical paradigm issues with a concurrent production of new prospects for social science researchers”. Morgan (2007) goes on to argue that the pragmatic nature of mixed methods research transpires into advancing ‘desired’ knowledge as opposed to abstract knowledge. Indeed, pragmatism has been referred to as an ‘ideal’ philosophical partner in a logical mixed methods approach (Johnson et al., 2007) and confirms an epistemological defence to the production of knowledge. The two methods therefore can underpin an optimal knowledge construction and are useful to explore the research question. The very nature of pragmatism therefore is a sound philosophical platform for a mixed methods approach Tashakkori et al. (2020). Therefore, the benefits of pragmatism are positive outcomes from using alternative methods to find the truth.

The research question asks ‘do entrepreneurial leaders generate societal and economic growth’ proposed for this research as augmented SME growth. Subsequently, such a diverse and complex subject cannot rely on one method to gather the data and therefore a mixed methods approach was used to provide a more comprehensive insight. Sil and Katzenstein (2010) claim that pragmatism centres on the practical outcomes found in new knowledge and helps to understand new problems and practical resolves within reality.

### 3.4 Research approach

This research seeks to progress the theory of entrepreneurial leadership using a sample from the population of Northern Ireland SME entrepreneurial leaders.

There are three approaches to developing theory through research, known as inductive, deductive and a combination of these two, the abductive approach. Table 3.2 summarises the approaches to developing theory (Saunders et al., 2019 p.145).



<b>Approach</b>	<b>Deductive</b>	<b>Inductive</b>	<b>Abductive</b>
<b>Logic</b>	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true.	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions.	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions.
<b>Generalisability</b>	Generalising from the general to the specific.	Generalising from the specific to the general.	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general.
<b>Use of data</b>	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses in relation to an existing theory.	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, and create a conceptual framework.	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, and locate these in a conceptual framework and test through subsequent data collection.
<b>Theory</b>	Theory falsification or verification.	Theory generation and building.	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory.

Table 3.2 The three approaches to developing theory. Source: Saunders et al. (2019)

The development of theory from a deductive perspective involves concluding after rigorous testing using law-like generalisations (facts) that a theory is true, and the conclusion must be true if all the premises are true (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010).

Saunders et al. (2019) maintain that the deductive approach to theory building is used when given an opportunity to research and modify or confirm a prevailing theory, whereas the inductive approach is where theory emerges from the empirical data. A critique of the deductive approach reveals a lack of clarity and reasoning about how to select the theory to be tested via a hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2019). An inductive approach to theory building identifies a gap in logic of the argument between the conclusion and the premises and a judgement must be made to support and evidence this gap (Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010). Gill and Johnson (2010 p.33) explain inductive reasoning to be:

“Moving from the plane of observation of the empirical world to the construction of explanations and theories, possibly using a conceptual framework, about what has been observed”.

Using an inductive approach to theory building is therefore the outcome of the research with no theory to draw on prior to this. Subsequently, enormous amounts of empirical data may not necessarily facilitate a sound platform for theory building.

Combining the deductive and inductive approach to theory building is known as ‘abductive’ theory development (Agar, 2010). There are scholars who are critical of abductive reasoning and have referred to it as “naive empiricism” (Klag and Langley, 2013 p.151) where issues are blurred between inductive and deductive approaches (Bell and Bryman, 2022). However, Dubois and Gadde (2002) assert that an abductive approach is more beneficial than a singular approach to theory development. Researching leadership using abduction has recently been used by Yawson (2016) who advocates a move away from a linear to a non-linear approach to leadership research. Consequently, an abductive approach to theory building was used for data gathering using a participant survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews to

achieve the research aim (Gill and Johnson, 2010). Lipscomb (2012) advocates the freedom for abduction that avoids the restrictions of a unilateral methodology and facilitates a more holistic explanation for a phenomenon. The abductive approach is a valid approach for research purposes (Alrajeh et al., 2012).

### 3.4 Research methodology

A research methodology is the basis of the process used by the researcher to collect, analyse, and interpret data (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). There are primarily two types of methodologies that emerge from the philosophies of research, and these are the quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method is essentially deductive and relies on facts to compare variables using statistics. The qualitative approach is typically inductive and supports the understanding of meaning in the world from the perspective of social actors contributing to the research (Saunders et al., 2019). It is the individual researcher's own philosophy of their research that connects the research to an indicative methodology (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

When choosing a research methodology, mindful of the philosophy, there are primarily three choices (Bell and Bryman, 2022). The mono-method (quantitative or qualitative), the multi-method (quantitative or qualitative) and finally mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative). The philosophy underpinning this research is pragmatism using abductive reasoning as the approach to theory development. A pragmatist in the main uses qualitative research methods, however, in considering reliability and credibility, the research also used quantitative methods. It follows then that for this research abductive reasoning was used to analyse the data collected through quantitative and qualitative methods.

Mixed methods research is defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Zohrabi, 2013). The main benefit of mixed methods research is that it provides a holistic view of the research and may reveal research findings that could have been missed if the research method was simpler (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela, 2004). This fusion of research approach is perceived by

many scholars to be more valuable as it can optimise the findings of a qualitative and quantitative approach (Zohrabi, 2013).

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches use different processes to meet the objectives of a research study in a social world. Punch (2013) pertains that the purpose of qualitative research is normally inductive, subjective, and contextual, while in contrast quantitative research is deductive, objective and general. Qualitative research assists the researcher in understanding the social world and collecting detailed data that is interpreted to help explain a phenomenon, while quantitative research provides objective data to attain knowledge of the social world. Subsequently, research into entrepreneurial leadership is suited firstly to quantitative research using abduction to interpret objectively the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented growth in SMEs. This approach diminishes the researcher's subjectivity in the interpretation of the results and increases the generalisation of the findings. Furthermore, the objectivity therefore standardises the treatment of each entrepreneurial leader completing the quantitative survey and provides a platform to check the findings are aligned to the qualitative research. Moreover, in achieving the research objectives the researcher hopes to generalise some results to inform SME policy.

Creswell et al. (2007 p.5) support the method of mixing quantitative and qualitative data.

“As a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing either quantitative and qualitative data in a single or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone”

Creswell et al. (2007 p.5)

A mixed methods approach also supports the pragmatist's assumptions and beliefs and presents a less restricted view of one method or another. It overcomes the weakness of a singular method whilst adapting to the requirements of the real-world combining methods (Tashakkori et al., 2020). It also suggests relevant solutions to the research question and objectives. Moreover, the mixed method approach is sometimes referred to as the third methodological movement (Creswell et al., 2011)

and is a welcome addition to the research community (Mayring, 2007) that enables diverse research perspectives.

There have been many criticisms of using a mixed methods approach from scholars regarding the conflict of the two traditional paradigms (Symonds and Gorard, 2010). This is primarily focused on the position of the researcher and their inferences regarding knowledge building. Gorard and Cook (2007) define mixed methods within a study simply as the use of a number of techniques for the production of a complete data set that provides an independent report on the outcomes of the research. Tashakkori et al. (2020) argue that the mixed methods research methodology applies to a wide range of logical enquiry that produces an accurate method selection. Creswell et al. (2011) claim that the mixed methods approach should emanate from the research question and be liberated from traditional methodological design to gain answers to research questions and contribute to knowledge and theory building or modification. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017) the strength of a mixed methods approach can lead to a deeper understanding and explanation for knowledge development.

Nevertheless, there has been intense criticism of using the mixed methods approach from the perspectives that the research conventions for merging of methodological approaches have not been adequately resolved (Flick 2002) and lack theoretical design (Kelle and Erzberger, 2004). The main argument upholding the use of a mixed methods research study design is the use of 'logic' stemming from the research aim and aiding a systematic reflection of the strengths and weaknesses in the research design (Tashakkori et al., 2020). The debate between these two methodological approaches has raised questions relating to legitimacy and credibility (Morse, 2010). Scholars argue that it is paramount that the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data is separate at the outset however this limits the feasibility of the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in a research study. Yin (2017) cautions simply combining qualitative and quantitative data to inform knowledge, recommending the use of combined 'tactics' in data collection.

This research has adopted a mixed methods research approach using quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to explore the relationship between

entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in SMEs. This has been achieved through a quantitative approach with a follow-up qualitative data collection and analysis to overcome the weakness of a single method approach (Creswell, 2013). Several views are considered by the researcher not just a singular positivist view which contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

### 3.6 Research design

The research design is a mixed method approach and Gall et al. (2007 p.32) argue that “this approach provides richer insights and raises more interesting questions for future research than if only one set of studies is considered”. Mixed methods therefore encourage multiple world views and supports a practical research approach. Creswell and Clark (2017) maintain that the mixed methods approach solves problems using narrative and numbers and concurs with this research in adopting a pragmatic approach to achieving the research aim.

To gain an understanding of the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented growth in SMEs it was necessary to establish in the first instance if there is any relationship through quantitative measures. Once established the mixed methods approach facilitated exploring the identified aspects in greater depth. This concurs with Tashakkori et al. (2020) who advocate how the mixed methods research literature enhances and extends further than single quantitative or qualitative measures by incorporating and combining the data collected. Bryman (2007) argues that sound integration in mixed methods research provides the scenario where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Table 3.3 is adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2017) and underpins the differing approaches to mixed methods research design and data collection. This approach is underscored by an Explanatory Sequential Design model and is the selected design method used for this research study.

<b>Mixed Method Design</b>	<b>Phased data collection activity</b>
Convergent parallel design	Quantitative and Qualitative data collected concurrently
Embedded Design	One phase is inside the other
Transformative Design	Research data focused on the theory framework like explanatory
Multiphase Design	Repeated use of the two phases in a limited time period
Exploratory Sequential Design	Qualitative research first followed by quantitative research – no guiding theory or framework and variables are unknown
Explanatory Sequential Design	Quantitative study followed by a qualitative study.

Table 3.3 Mixed Methods design and data collection activity. Source: Adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2017).

The advantage of an explanatory sequential design is the extended opportunity to explore the participants emerging from the quantitative study. This process enables the researcher to also assess the validity and reliability of the research findings (Hessie-Biber, 2010). The quantitative data will be analysed statistically in the first instance and will be explored in greater detail through the personal views of entrepreneurial leaders which will be categorised around specific themes, providing a more complex view and understanding of the entrepreneurial leaders lived experiences (McMahon, 2007).

The mixed methods explanatory sequential model for this study is adapted and illustrated in Table 3.4 and has three overarching stages.

Stage 1	Process	Outcome
Quantitative Data Collection	Web based Survey n=204 (Cross Sectional) Qualtrics	Numerical Data
Quantitative Data Analysis	Data Screening Frequencies Relationships Correlations IBM SPSS v 25	Descriptive statistics Relationship analysis (Chi) Kruskal-Wallis Test
Stage 2	Process	Outcome
Selection of interviewees from quantitative questionnaires – interview process development	Selection of 20 participants from the questionnaires (non-probability sampling) Develop interview questions	Participants n=20
Qualitative Data Collection	Email invitation to participants Semi-structured interviews virtually on MS Teams	Narrative and text data
Qualitative Data Analysis	Coding Thematic analysis NVivo software 12	Codes and themes Child nodes
Stage 3	Process	Outcome
Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative results (Triangulation)	Interpretation and explanation of qualitative and quantitative results	Discussion Implications Further Research

Table 3.4 The explanatory sequential research design model. Source: Adapted from Ivankova et al. (2006)

In stage 1 of the study, a survey was designed to collect data and establish the socially enabling intentions and actions of the entrepreneurial leader. The variables tested were the entrepreneurial leader (independent variable) and their contribution to augmented SME growth (dependent variable). Table 3.5 below summaries the profile of survey responses in relation to SME size.



No of responses	Size of SME (Employees)
44	Zero Employees
96	1-9 Employees
64	10+ Employees
n = 204	Total survey responses

Table 3.5 Profile of quantitative responses in relation to SME Size

The second, qualitative component followed on in stage 2 of the research data collection process and explored at a deeper level, the intentions, and subsequent contributory actions of the entrepreneurial leader in relation to generating augmented SME growth. The qualitative data revealed subtle nuances of each participant's answer, thereby allowing 'augmented growth' to be considered in more detail.

The final question in stage one data collection invited participants to 'opt in' for a qualitative interview and if agreeable entered their email address. There were 81 participant emails in total willing to be interviewed. The researcher emailed all the 81 agreeable participants requesting them to agree to a certain time slot. The target qualitative interviews required (20) to facilitate data collection from a range of business sizes are identified in table 3.6. Once all the interview time slots were filled for that SME size, the researcher responded with an email to explain that the participant was no longer required for interview. In total 20 participant entrepreneurial leaders were selected from the 'opting in' candidates. Attempting to eliminate bias in size of SME, the 20 participants represented various sizes of SME. There were no other profile criteria for selection of the entrepreneurial leader for semi-structure interviews to avoid bias from any sector/region/age and facilitate generalisation of findings and sentiment from entrepreneurial leaders toward exploring the research question.

No of participants interviewed	Size of SME (Employees)
9	Zero Employees
6	1-9 Employees
5	10+ Employees
n = 20	Total Interviews

Table 3.6 Profile of qualitative interviews in relation to SME Size

The 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted via MS Teams and providing an efficient and effective approach to collecting qualitative data. Stage 2 was analysed using NVivo 12.

As regards to timing, the research is a cross-sectional design endorsed by the premise that SMEs are inextricably linked to a dynamic pace of change in their external and subsequent internal operations environment. There is wide research to support a longitudinal research approach in SME research (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2013) however the cross sectional 'snapshot' is mitigated by the extensive empirical data collected and the valuable implications the research study contributes to theory, policy and practice.

### 3.7 Research strategy

According to Veal (2017), it is fundamental in any research to collect both primary data and existing secondary research in the form of an academic literature review and industry reports (grey literature). A variety academic and grey research literature was used to develop the literature review. Although books are unlikely to give adequate up to date coverage of the research question, they did provide a useful starting point and contained references for further reading. This enabled refinement of the literature

around the research objectives and helped to clarify how this research related to previous research and reveal any gaps in the literature. Further details of the flexible systematic literature review used for this research study can be found in Appendix 10.

### 3.7.1 Primary research strategy

This research was a mixed methods approach using a survey in the first instance followed by qualitative data collection for thematic analysis. Saunders et al. (2019) explain that a survey sample can be taken from the survey population and then followed up with a semi-structured interview to explore and gather qualitative data.

Stage 1 of the strategy was the distribution of the questionnaire to gather quantitative data from a population sample of 204 SMEs through a Qualtrics link. This was a cost effective and efficient manner of quantitative data collection. The survey provided an impartial and credible way of determining any relationships between the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented growth in NI SMEs. The relationships identified from the survey were also used to check the validity and accuracy of the responses to the interview questions (Altrichter et al., 2013; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

From the survey questionnaire a sample of 20 qualitative semi-structured interviews were then conducted with entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs and this was Stage 2 of the sequential explanatory model. This involved recording the interviews on MS Teams, creating individual interview transcriptions, and finally uploading into NVivo12. Coding of the transcriptions enabled the development of themes that arose from the analysis of the quantitative survey. A thematic analysis methodological approach was used for identifying, analysing, and reporting the findings by way of themes arising from the semi-structured qualitative interviews (Clarke and Braun, 2021) to provide enriched data to reach the research aim. There are other approaches that could have been used beyond thematic analysis, namely discourse analysis, reflective narrative analysis and grounded theory analysis. For the purposes of this study, the method of thematic analysis was selected to enable deeper interpretation of qualitative responses providing more meaningful understanding of entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in SMEs. NVivo 12 software package was used for coding to

assist in identifying themes that emerged, enriching the researcher's interpretation, and also enabling triangulation.

Triangulation is used in social science research to provide a higher level of confidence and validity in using two or more research methods (Rothbauer, 2008). Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) refer to data triangulation as the collecting of data over different times or from different sources. The use of triangulation through the qualitative and quantitative findings for this research underpinned the credibility and reliability of the research analysis thereby enriching the empirical data. Identification of relationships from the survey data analysis was checked against the validity and accuracy of the responses to the interview questions (Altrichter et al., 2013; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). There was also consideration for data triangulation during the qualitative interviews where the reflexivity of the researcher established trustworthiness (Krefting, 1991) and underpinned the research credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Conclusively there was a consistent approach to obtaining a seamless convergence of mixed methods to confirm the data findings and evidence a meticulous investigation (Breitmayer, 1991) and the eradication of personal bias. The qualitative analysis strategy and rationale for triangulation of data can be found in Appendix 9.

### 3.7.2 Research time boundary

The time taken to attain a research aim can vary between a relatively short period to years. Moreover, the nature of entrepreneurial leadership in SMEs is recognised by persistent dynamic change and therefore the cross-sectional approach provides a reliable 'snapshot' of leadership behaviour in real time. This research is a cross-sectional study exploring the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth and the survey data was collected between 14<sup>th</sup> February and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. The use of cross-sectional research projects for academic reasons is aligned to many research projects (Creswell and Creswell, 2017) and valid for analysing a research aim or phenomena within a precise time period.

### 3.7.3 Data collection

There are two activities that are associated with techniques for collecting data, firstly the collection of data and secondly the analysis of data (Tashakkori et al., 2020). These are used to generate accurate, ethical, and rich data.

This research has been designed to include two data collection techniques, namely a survey questionnaire and semi structured interviews. The questionnaires were piloted in January 2021 and distributed in February 2021 with a closure date of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Participants were invited at the end of the survey to self-select for personal interview. The interviews took place in May 2021.

The following sections detail the techniques and processes for stage 1 quantitative and stage 2 qualitative data collection.

### 3.8 Quantitative research methods

Scholars of the quantitative approach applaud objective and observable behaviours that can be interpreted using numerical data (Van raan, 2013). Delis et al. (2004) emphasise one of the primary advantages as the raised validity and reliability measures in data collection and analysis.

There are two types of quantitative approach, the experimental and non-experimental approach. The non-experimental approach is most appropriate for this research study as the data's purpose is to explore the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth. As Gall et al. (2007) state there are three types of non-experimental approaches, and these are descriptive, causal-comparative, and correlational. This research will use the correlational approach in analysing the collected quantitative data.

The correlational approach has been defined by Devetak et al. (2010 p.32) to be "Correlational studies investigate the possibility of relationships between two variables, although more than two variables are common". This study sought to explain the various associations across variables and whether they explain more about

the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth. Therefore, the research identified and analysed the relationships between two key variables and underpins the spirit of correlational analysis. The key purpose of a research study using correlation is developing understanding around a phenomenon both descriptively and using correlation of variables to underpin the analysis. Therefore, the use of a questionnaire in stage 1 of the data collection was most suited to this research as it can identify relationships between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth. The importance of a quantitative research strategy is that it can uncover the answers to the questions about what, where how much and who within a particular time frame (Yin 2017).

### 3.8.1 Sampling approach

It was impossible to cover every SME business in Northern Ireland in the sample, but it was important to utilise as representative a sample as possible, that could then be used to generalise the findings with the whole population. Saunders et al. (2019) define a population as the full set of components from which the samples are taken.

A target of 200 SMEs was sought out from a national Northern Ireland population of 124,000 SMEs. This included self-employed entrepreneurial leaders with no additional employees. The sample of SMEs were not sector specific since the unit of analysis of this research was the entrepreneurial leader of SMEs. Field (2017) claims that a sample is a small subset of the population and sampling is the activity, process, or method for selecting a sample. Sampling explicitly permits the research to not have to survey the whole population and is a timelier and cost-effective method for completing a research study.

To decide on a specific sample the researcher must select between different probability-based strategies. The selection of a sample may introduce an element of judgement for the researcher such as purposive, judgement or non-probability selection (Mason, 2010). According to Bell and Bryman (2022) probability sampling is typically aligned to surveys whereas non-probability sampling requires a purposive judgement from the researcher to select a representative sample. However, this means that the sample chosen is not a refined representation of the whole population.

This concurs with Patton (2002) who argues that the research findings cannot be generalised to reflect the whole population. Therefore, to uphold the accuracy of the sample the researcher must choose participants that are a strong representation of the target population to precisely represent the total population.

Scholars of mixed methods research explain that meta-inferences are the interpretation of qualitative and quantitative research findings. Therefore, the quality of mixed methods research outcomes are “impacted by the sampling technique decisions” (Collins, 2015 p.354). Meta-inferences from mixed methods research can either be “two distinct sets of coherent wholes or integrated into a coherent whole” (Onwuegbuzie and Combs, 2010 p.398). As this research is abductive there is a requirement for both deductive and inductive data analysis and subsequently two different sampling techniques. Therefore, both non-probability and probability sampling strategies were intended to identify the research participants. Using probability sampling strategy is where “every participant has an equal opportunity of being selected” (Fink, 2016 p.10) from the ‘known’ target population (Field, 2013) of 124,000 SMEs in Northern Ireland with 0-249 employees.

However, probability sampling is typically associated with random sampling techniques found in large national funded surveys that are promoted heavily using these resources. Furthermore, random sampling techniques can be “impossible when the population is very large” (Eitikan, 2016 p.2) and are also generally “far too expensive and cumbersome” when a researcher has limited time and resources” (Emerson, 2015 p.165). For this research ‘convenience’ sampling’ was used where individuals of the population are easier to access by the researcher (Given, 2008). Hence, Individual entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs (0-249 employees) were identified in several ways, including using the significant social SME relationship networks of the researcher. It was also an efficient way to conduct research with SMEs which are renown to be a difficult population to collect data from due to the limited time SME entrepreneurial leaders have (Sin et al., 2016). A form of snowball sampling was also used where the researcher’s relationship networks socially shared the ‘questionnaire link’ with their SME networks suggesting questionnaire completion. A mix of convenience and snowball sampling facilitated the desired number of respondents (204) across Northern Ireland, with the hope that each entrepreneurial leader would

share unique and rich information. The significant sample size also increases the statistical power of the sample. It is however pertinent to note that convenience sampling is most likely to introduce bias (Mackey and Gass, 2015), diminish predictability and is also vulnerable to hidden biases that inhibit generalisability from the sample to the target population. There is also the risk of gathering poor quality data leading to challenges in the findings and outcomes of the research. Critics of convenience sampling also argue it is an inappropriate method for social science research and may lead to severe research limitations (Leiner, 2014). Nevertheless, the quantitative findings from convenience sampling are purposive in achieving a breadth of understanding for exploring SME entrepreneurial leaders and their contribution to augmented growth.

### 3.8.2 Sample size

The size of a sample in a research study facilitates the researcher to make generalisations and confidently reach sound conclusions from what may be considered a limited amount of data. Therefore, it is no surprise that the sample size is partly calculation and the researcher's own judgement of a representative sample. To decide on a minimum sample size can be troublesome in addition to considering the time, cost, accessibility of participants and support facilities. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that the compromises taken by the researcher lie in the confidence the researcher has in their representative data sample, the analysis of the statistical data and minimum thresholds and finally the size of the target population that a sample is drawn from.

The 204 respondents are located in Northern Ireland and Chart 3.1 below shows the geographical location of survey responses and shows there were responses submitted from across Northern Ireland. This supports the validity of the research from across Northern Ireland.



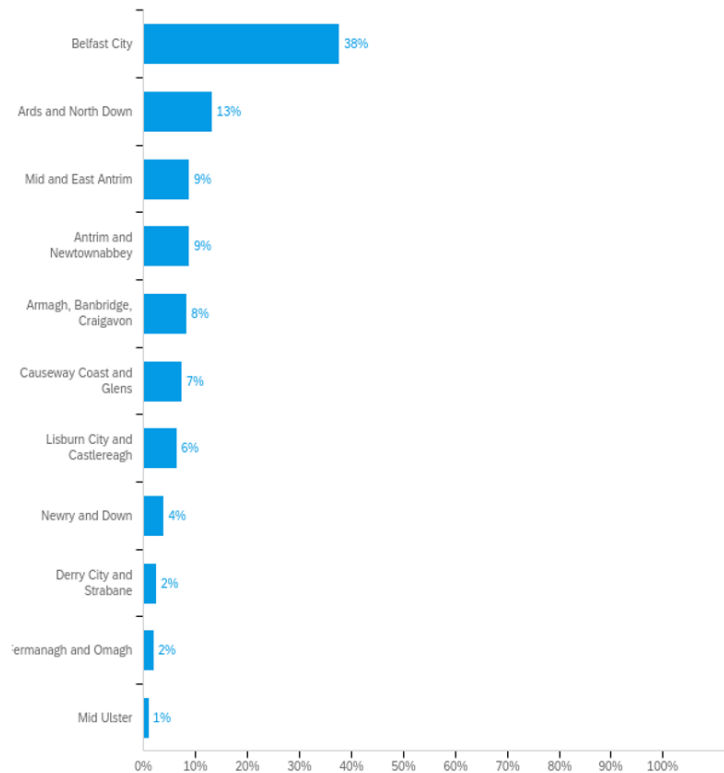


Chart 3.1 Geographical location of survey responses

The role of the entrepreneurial leader was also distinguished in the survey sample, with 68% presenting themselves as Owner/Founders, 22% Managing Directors and 10% shareholder respondents. Collectively it is assumed that the respondents are key decision makers for SME growth.

The age profile of the sample of SME entrepreneurial leaders are illustrated in the bar chart below, that shows 55% of respondents to be 46-60 years of age. The chart below shows a robust range of age group responses for validity. However, age was not an element considered relevant in analysing the data for the purposes of exploring the research question.

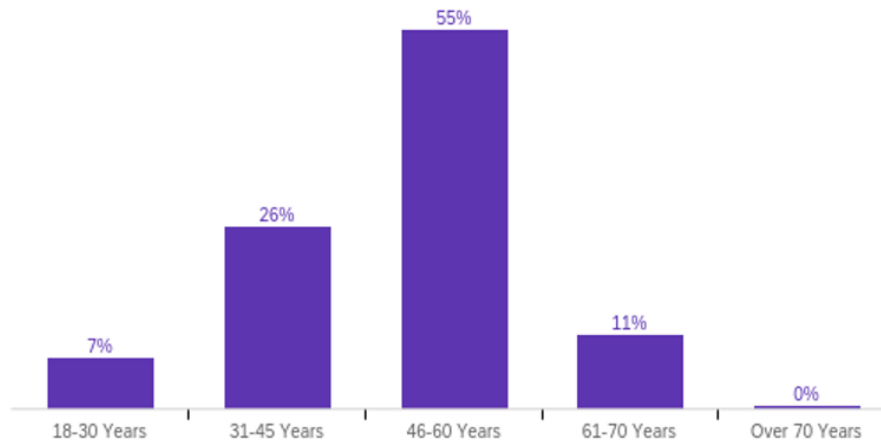


Chart 3.2 Age of survey response

### 3.8.3 Questionnaire

The use of questionnaire enabled the collection of data from a large population both effectively and efficiently. It facilitates the collection of quantitative data that can be used to complete inferential and descriptive statistical analysis. The questionnaire process enables data collection from target populations to be used to identify and test the research variables within that population (Saunders et al., 2019).

The advantage of using a questionnaire for data collection, particularly as an on-line questionnaire, is it can be distributed economically over a wide geographical area to a significant number of participants. Oppenheim (2000) also endorses the flexibility of questionnaires as they can be completed at a time convenient to the participants. Krosnick (2018) argues that questionnaires give participants the opportunity to complete the questionnaire without any scrutiny or judgement by the researcher and therefore instrumental in removing researcher bias.

However, there are identified limitations in the form of lost opportunity for participants to explain their answers or illustrate their understanding of the questions using examples. Participants also may struggle with no opportunity to ask questions before completing a question if it appears vague (Krosnick 2018).

#### 3.8.4 Questionnaire design

The length of a questionnaire can have an impact on the participant particularly if it is long and repetitive where boredom and completion fatigue may occur. The challenge was to ensure that the questionnaire was user friendly and did not take longer than 10-15 minutes to complete. Saunders et al., (2019) suggest a questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes. To test the length of time to complete, the researcher timed the completion of the questionnaire on several occasions during pre-pilot testing. In addition, pilot participants were asked to check how long it took to complete the questionnaire on average it took 12 minutes to complete. The on-line method for the pilot study was appropriate as this reflected a 'test' platform for the main survey and the on-line survey provider (Qualtrics) supplied guidance on analysing and interpreting the data collected in the questionnaire. Using an on-line survey technique was efficient for the researcher as other elements of the research study could be progressed during the pilot study.

Table 3.7 illustrates the six parts (Qualtrics blocks) underpinning the structure of the questionnaire for this research study. The following explanation also underpins the reliability of the questionnaire drawn from measures used in prior research. The first part is descriptive and established the characteristics of the SME entrepreneurial leaders, including basic demographic information. This was labelled section A of the questionnaire and included gender, age, number of employees, sector, and geographical location of the business. The questions for this section were selected to set context and establish the profile of the participants for the study by collecting descriptive data. The literature drawn on to inform these questions were modelled from various sources, the Enterprise Research Centre (2018) and NI (GEM) 2018. There were also comparisons made with the Enterprise Northern Ireland annual SME Research Barometer (2017-2020) that draws research from over 700 SMEs annually.

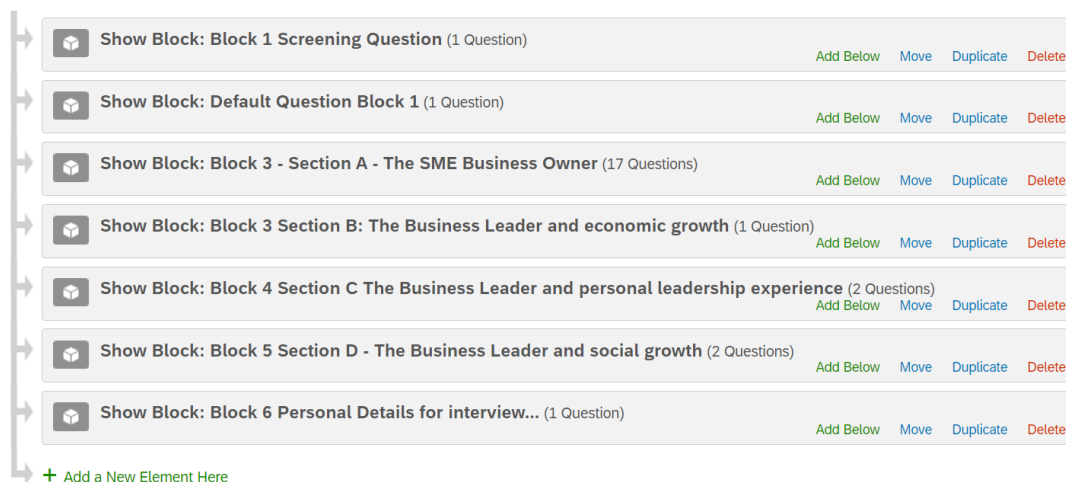


Table 3.7 Six-part Qualtrics blocks for questionnaire design (Source: Developed for this research).

The second part, Section B, of the questionnaire focused on the entrepreneurial leaders' perceptions and engagement in economic growth measures and used ordinal Likert and ranking scales to measure importance of factors. Likert scales are known to be highly influential to measure latent and unobservable constructs (Jebb et al., 2021). Survey respondents could select from extremely important to extremely unimportant in a five-point scale. To facilitate more impactful visual clarity, this was refined to important and unimportant. Section B was developed from research completed by Herman et al. (2015) that informed the Enterprise Research Centre research in 2018, measuring indicators of entrepreneurial ambition. Further to this, primary research by Guieu and Guieu (2014) also informed the research tool and confirmed by a systematic review of growth constraints by Gherhes et al. (2016). This was also measured using the Likert Scale, that supported understanding and ease of familiar responses from respondents.

Section C, of the questionnaire explored, using Likert Scales to measure the business leaders' personal leadership style regarding the entrepreneurial leaders work life balance and personal wellbeing, the measuring tool was informed primary research by Weber et al., (2015); Douglas, (2013) and Welbourne et al. (2012).

The final part, Section D, questions were informed by primary research in the social entrepreneurial leader literature measuring the generation of social impact by Rae (2017), Thompson (2002) and Adams (2006). The full questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.

### 3.8.5 Reliability of quantitative research

The reliability of quantitative research in the social sciences is defined by the degree to which the research tool can consistently produce the same results. Saunders et al. (2019 p.202) purport that “reliability refers to replication and consistency”. The difficulty for the researcher is that respondents can consistently interpret a question in one way, however the researcher is looking for something else. Hair et al. (2019) argues that one of the most important outcomes of the pilot study is to test for internal consistency and if this shows that the scales have good internal consistency the research can more confidently proceed to the next stage. Testing for reliability needs to be embedded into the research design and robust piloting of the questionnaire is a method to ensure reliability of responses from participants. The steps taken to ensure reliability can be found in section 3.8.7 and 3.9.3.

### 3.8.6 Validity of quantitative research

The quality of research not only depends on reliability but also on the validity of the research. Validity asks the important question as to whether the research instrument is measuring what it is supposed to measure. Whilst this may sound simple, in social sciences research this can be difficult as attitudes cannot be measured directly. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that internal validity is demonstrated when the research precisely establishes a relationship between two variables. The challenge of measuring ‘latent’ concepts however requires that the right measurement instrument is applied though this is very difficult to achieve (Golafshani, 2003). If not achieved, then the research will produce invalid results and the conclusions will not be reliable as a similar study would reach different results and false statistical relationships. For a research design to have external validity it requires testing several times in different contexts to confirm the external validity and establish statistical generalisability.

Saunders et al. (2019) indicate that there are four types of measurement of internal validity designed to assess the intention of measuring latent constructs within a questionnaire. These are face validity, construct validity, content validity and predictive validity. Face validity is where the researcher asks some participants to evaluate the research device (the questions in the questionnaire) and provide feedback to check their perception of the questionnaire and whether it is valid. Content validity evaluates the content of the questions to ensure they are appropriate to measure the latent construct that the researcher is intent on measuring (Guercini, 2014). The judgement by the researcher to be considered here is that the content within the questions is aligned to a theory and to how the construct is intended to operate (Muijs, 2010). The content of the questionnaire can also be considered by a panel of experts for “adequate coverage” however a judgement of average coverage is required to be made by the researcher (Saunders et al., 2019 p.450). This is achieved by ensuring that the research aim is clearly established following the literature review and then discussed in depth with an expert panel of academics and stakeholders in the research. The key questions to be asked are if firstly the question is critical to answering the research aim, secondly if useful but not critical or finally not essential at all. The predictive validity is if the questions provide responses that can be used to predict participants’ behaviour. In assessing predictive validity, the data on the variables collected from the questionnaire will be compared to specific criteria to seek correlations between variables. Construct validity is more aligned to the social sciences where it assesses validity based on the extent to which the questions measure the presence of a latent construct the researcher intended to measure. This is typically found in attitude scales and invokes the researcher to question whether they can generalise from the scale data collected and apply it precisely to the construct intended to be measured. For the purposes of this research internal validity was established using face, content and construct validity measures. Predictive validity is not conducive in an explanatory research study.

To ensure internal validity using face, content, and construct validity the questionnaire was shared with two PhD supervisors and three internal PhD examiners in addition to a review by an experienced economist. This economist has more than 25 years’ experience across a range of areas and was previously Senior Research Economist with the Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland (ERINI). Further to this, a

pilot study with 10 participants was also completed in January 2021 and this ensured sufficient internal validity before quantitative data gathering commenced.

### 3.8.7 Pilot study

White and McBurney (2012) claim the benefits of a pilot study allow the researcher to test the questions on participants and if necessary, modify the research design before the actual data collection commences. The aim of the pilot study was to identify any unforeseen problems with the questionnaire instrument and ensure it was valid, designed reliably for the intended purpose, and contributed to attaining the research aim. When designing the research instrument, it can sometimes be difficult to foresee any problems around feasibility and the pilot allows alterations and enhancements by way of a remedy to overcome this challenge.

#### 3.8.7.1 Process and procedure of pilot

As part of the research study and ethics application a participant guide for the qualitative research and the quantitative research was prepared and submitted (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4). In December 2020 the ethics application was approved (see Appendices 5,6 and 7) and 10 entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs were contacted to operationalise the pilot questionnaire (Fink, 2016).

#### 3.8.7.2 Questionnaire pilot

The preliminary questionnaire was uploaded to Qualtrics, an anonymous link generated and emailed to 10 entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs. The pilot participants were selected through convenience sampling from businesses familiar to the researcher. The entrepreneurial leaders were invited in a cover email to firstly read the participant guide (Appendix 2) and then complete the questionnaire (Appendix 1). To ensure the questionnaire was completed by entrepreneurial leaders of the businesses, a screening question was added to ensure they were the owner/founders/managing director or CEO of the business. The participants were informed beforehand of the voluntary nature of the pilot survey and consent was sought by instructing them to complete the participant consent form at the beginning of the online survey. In addition

to the entrepreneurial leaders, the pilot survey was also sent to three experienced academics and PhD Supervisors from the business school.

### 3.8.7.3 Review of pilot study

Bougie and Sekaran (2019) conclude that the pilot study provides information that can improve the validity and reliability of a questionnaire. The pilot study assessed the questionnaire's ability to measure the items required, reduce misunderstanding and errors of the questionnaire, and establish the required internal consistency. There were six questions that had to be reworded after the pilot study was completed. In addition, the flow of the survey was amended whereby those entrepreneurial leaders with no employees moved directly to the final section of the questionnaire, eliminating the need for them to read 'irrelevant' questions.

### 3.8.8 Survey procedures for distribution

Stage 1 – Distribution of questionnaire.

The cover email narrative (Appendix 2) was kept to a minimum to encourage completion of the survey. The link for the survey was the main component of the email and the participant guide was embedded in the Qualtrics anonymous link. The participant guide (Appendix 2) had all the appropriate details and included an introduction about the researcher, contact details, title and purpose of the research study, why the need to collect data, confidentiality statement, limitations on use of the data collected and invitation to complete the survey. All GDPR regulations were adhered to in the process. A period of 45 'live' days were given for the survey completion and ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

The first phase of the survey distribution used the convenience sampling method (signpost back to the section you discuss this here) where the researcher 'snowballed' personal SME entrepreneurial leader contacts with a request to complete the questionnaire themselves and share with two contacts who they were sure would



complete the survey. The process generated a sample size of 240, with 36 removed because they were incomplete, giving an overall sample size of  $n=204$ .

The second phase of the survey distribution was where the Qualtrics anonymous link was shared with the researcher's contacts in SME membership organisations, namely the Institute of Directors (IoD), the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Invest Northern Ireland (INI). Further to this, a key point of distribution was the SME support organisation Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI). ENI represents 28 Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) in Northern Ireland. Enterprise Northern Ireland works with thousands of entrepreneurs enabling them to grow and develop their SME. To ensure the survey was completed by entrepreneurial leaders of the businesses a screening question was added to ensure they were the owner/founders/managing director or CEO of the business.

While collecting the survey data for stage 1, the researcher posed a text question at the end requesting each respondent's willingness to participate in stage 2 of the research, that would take the form of a 45-minute interview. This method facilitated a random sample through 'self-selection' to generate potential respondents for stage 2 of the data collection. The information requested was the name and email of the respondent and the number of employees to establish the size of the SME represented. From the sample generated, this facilitated the researcher to select a representative sample of SMEs for qualitative semi-structured interview, to enhance the content validity of stage 2 of the research.

### 3.9 Qualitative research methods

Since the focus of the research is to explore a deeper understanding and explanation of entrepreneurial leadership, the research focused on collecting qualitative data through in-depth semi-structured interviews. In order to ensure the research aim and objectives were met it was necessary for the researcher to structure the questions consistently and pose questions that did not elicit a biased response (Yin, 2017). The research used open-ended questions and probed some discussion with the entrepreneurial leaders (Appendix 3). The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it is a relatively relaxed interview process facilitating elaboration on points of

interest by the participant (Saunders et al., 2019). The interview also provides an opportunity for clarification of the respondents views and opinions in relation to the outcomes of the questionnaire.

### 3.9.1 Data collection method – In-depth interviews

This method is widely used in qualitative research (Blumberg et al., 2014; Bell and Bryman, 2022) especially one-to-one interviews. Saunders et al. (2019 p.374) confirm that the qualitative interview “is a purposeful conversation between two or more people, requiring the interviewer to establish rapport, to ask concise and unambiguous questions, to which the interviewee is willing to respond and to listen attentively”. There were 20 interviews conducted with entrepreneurial leaders to uncover more in-depth and richer responses than the quantitative questionnaire with a focus on exploring, at a deeper level, the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth.

Data collection for qualitative research can be observation, focus groups or interviews. In-depth interviewing is the primary means for obtaining data. In addition, since entrepreneurial leaders are a complex phenomenon in business growth Saunders et al. (2019) posit that interviews are the only way to collect data on complex issues. Indeed, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015 p.81) argue “the aim is to study people’s experience as seen from their points of view or the social construction of knowledge concerning the chosen topic”. This way of collecting data is also useful to deepen understanding of “unaccountable process data peculiar to individuals” (Galloway and Kelly 2009 p.8). Interviews also provide a useful opportunity to collect rich data as individuals can tell stories and reveal context, structure vision and actions (Charmaz, 2006).

There are categories of qualitative interviewing techniques that were available to the researcher from structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are more appropriate for a positivist researcher and quantitative methodology and data is collected systematically (Johnstone, 2007). The unstructured interview is another form of interviewing where the individual can really talk freely (Saunders et al., 2019). The ‘interviewer effect’ (Gray, 2009 p.217) can bias the data

collected and result in no pattern or themes emerging. As this research seeks rich insight to the entrepreneurial leaders' personal context and experience, the semi-structured interview is deemed to be most appropriate.

The semi-structured approach to in-depth interviewing provides the researcher with opportunities for themes to emerge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). A semi-structured interview facilitates a sequence of questions that account for areas of interest by the entrepreneurial leader. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that semi-structured interviews can lead to discussion with interesting insights that are in turn significant for the research area and contributing to the research aim. The researcher can then question the interviewee for clarity on certain issues that have been discussed. According to Blumberg et al. (2014 p.258) there are two main objectives of semi-structured interviews "On one hand, the researcher wants to know the respondent's perspective on the issue and on the other, they also want to know whether the respondent can confirm insights and information the researcher already holds". Consequently, semi-structured interviews are considered the most appropriate for this research into the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth.

There have been several studies on entrepreneurial leadership that have used semi-structured interviews for the collection of data. These include Swiercz and Lydon (2002); Currie et al. (2008); Jones and Crompton (2009); Leitch et al. (2009); Kempster and Cope (2010); Harrison et al. (2018); Omeihe et al. (2020). Nevertheless, to mitigate this challenge, the questions for the in-depth semi structured interviews were generated after the quantitative data collection and analysis was completed. These questions explored the unexplained elements of the quantitative survey and enriched the research findings by illuminating explanation at a contextual level. It was also important to note that the skills of the interviewer are reflexive and seek to recognise and note any elements that could limit true findings.

As a format semi-structured interviews have their advantages however there are also limitations that require consideration. Saunders et al. (2019) note the issue of reliability around semi-structured interviews whereby different researchers may discover conflicting information from the same information. Another limitation is the bias of the researcher, and it is here that the reflexivity of the interviewer's situational competence

mitigates the bias (Flick, 2014). Furthermore, the interviewee also can withhold important vital information or use dialogue so that they perceive what the interviewer wants to hear. Nevertheless, Bell and Bryman (2022) claim that semi-structured interviews for a cross sectional study cannot be repeatable as it occurs in real time and is therefore subject to the everchanging life happenings for the entrepreneurial leader. Subsequently, the value of qualitative interviews is not in their repeatability of the interaction, rather it is the flexibility it brings to the complex phenomenon of entrepreneurial leadership.

To ensure that the in-depth interviews are consistent and minimise any bias an interview participant guide (Appendix 3) around the important themes was designed. Blumberg et al. (2014 p.266) outline the purpose of a participant interview guide as “a memory list to the interviewer to ensure that the same issues are addressed in every interview”. Furthermore, the guide also reinforces the credibility and dependability of the research data (Bell and Bryman, 2022., Saunders et al., 2019) without challenging the flexibility of the interview format. The guide and the questions for the semi-structured interviews were approved by two senior academics in the researcher’s institution.

The semi-structured interview typically starts with a list of interview questions however the method enables and welcomes variation in the categories and themes that may emerge (Saunders et al., 2019). The interview questions emerged following the analysis of the quantitative survey and Table 3.8 explains each question’s rationale toward achieving the research aim.

Question	Justification for Question
Tell me about your business?	To relax the participant and begin the conversation with a simple open question.
What is important to you in relation to your work life balance? (Theme A)	To explore the personal values of entrepreneurial leaders in relation to social SME growth.

How do you like to be perceived by your SME stakeholders? (Theme A)	To explore the community building values of entrepreneurial leaders in relation to social SME growth.
What does business growth mean to you and why? (Theme B)	To establish whether entrepreneurial leaders perception of SME growth is primarily economic.
What could challenge your SME growth in the next 3 years? (Theme B)	To explore the entrepreneurial leaders' understanding of obstacles to SME growth?
What do you think are the opportunities for your SME growth in the next 3 years? (Theme B)	To explore the entrepreneurial leaders understanding of enablers to SME growth.
Is it important to grow your SME financially year on year? (Theme B)	To establish the importance of economic growth to entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs.
What decisions do you make that means your SME engages in non-commercial activities? (Theme C).	To explore whether the entrepreneurial leader engages in social growth (non-commercial) decision making.
Can you identify activities in your business that are aligned to social and or environmental responsibility? (Theme C)	To explore to what extent entrepreneurial leaders, engage in environmental and social activities.
Do you measure any social/environmental activities as part of your SME growth? (Theme C)	To establish whether entrepreneurial leaders measure social growth activities in their SME.
How important is the 'common good' to your SME over the next 3 years? (Theme C).	To explore the intentions of entrepreneurial leaders and social SME growth.
How important are reciprocal relationships between you and your stakeholders? (Theme C)	To establish the importance of building reciprocal relationships with entrepreneurial leaders' stakeholders.
How do you feel about employees engaging in non-commercial activities for the greater good (Theme D).	To explore the entrepreneurial leaders' intentions to engage employees in social growth activities.
How do you feel about your employee wellbeing (Theme D).	To explore entrepreneurial leaders' values around employee wellbeing as a form of social growth.
How do you feel about employees developing their skills? (Theme D).	To explore entrepreneurial leaders' values around employee development as a form of social growth.

How do you feel about employees having a say in your SME growth? (Theme D).	To explore entrepreneurial leaders' values around employee engagement as a form of social growth.
<p><b>General Finishing Questions:</b></p> <p>Reflecting on your business, what are your hopes for the future?</p> <p>Is there anything else that you would like to add to the conversation that I have not asked regarding commercial and non-commercial challenges?</p> <p>Do you have any questions for me?</p>	<p>To establish the entrepreneurial leaders' intentions for future SME growth.</p> <p>To facilitate opportunity for further questions or comments by entrepreneurial leaders to the researcher.</p>

Table 3.8 Rationale for topical questions in semi-structured Interviews. Source: Developed for this research

The interview questions were logical and unambiguous starting with simple questions at the beginning of the interview to 'warm up' the interviewee and avoid questions that might compromise the participant (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, the researcher was careful not to ask any leading questions during the interview. The researcher was careful that the interview time was not too long or short and managed the time allocated by the entrepreneurial leader (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The interviews lasted on average around 45 minutes. As the interviews were with entrepreneurial leaders who own their own business, there were sensitivities to be managed by the interviewer and therefore confidentiality was paramount with no pressure to answer any of the questions that were uncomfortable for the participant. Participants were also asked to complete and return a participant consent form before the interview began (Appendix 4). Throughout the 20 interviews there was no refusal to answer any of the questions presented by the researcher.

### 3.9.2 Sampling approach

The sample of entrepreneurial leaders for the semi-structured interviews were self-selected from the quantitative survey, there were 20 interviews in total.

The sample criteria for the semi-structured interviews were:

The entrepreneurial leader has either owner/ founded the business or is the managing director/CEO or a stakeholder.

The business is in Northern Ireland

- The business has between 0-249 employees

The sample size for the semi-structured interviews is illustrated in Table 3.9:

Size of SME	Proportion in NI %	Numbers interviewed
0 Employees	22% (44)	8
1-9 Employees	47% (96)	6
10+ Employees	31% (64)	6
Total	100% (204)	20

Table 3.9 Sample size for semi-structured interviews

Following the stages of the explanatory sequential approach, an informal self-nomination process through the quantitative questionnaire was used to obtain the required sample of entrepreneurial leaders with the above criteria for semi-structured interviews.

### 3.9.3 Pilot Study – qualitative semi-structured interviews

Veal (2017 p.364) advocates the advantages of piloting interviews, to “gain familiarity with the respondents” and to “fine tune the survey process”. Three pilot interviews with entrepreneurial leaders were conducted which did not form part of the main sample. The pilot interviews were arranged via email and Microsoft Teams meetings set up. The entrepreneurial leaders selected were advised to read the study participant guide and complete the participant consent form. The interviewees were asked for permission to record the interview pilot and assured that they would be sent the

recording immediately after the interview to ensure accuracy and to establish that the researcher's interpretation was appropriate. On completion of the on-line survey, pilot interviewees were also asked for feedback on whether they felt the interview process could be enhanced. A field journal was also used at the pilot stage to enable the researcher to take any notes that would inform bias. Indeed, it is recommended by Saunders et al. (2019) that to ensure the reliability and validity of the interview questions they must be tested before the interview schedule begins to eradicate any possible problems.

Prior to the in-depth interview pilot, the interview questions were shared and critiqued by three research academics and two PhD supervisors from the Business School within Ulster University. It was also shared and critiqued by three business experts in the SME sector and by an experienced economist (as before) who regularly engages in research into SMEs. These steps ensured the reliability and validity of the research instruments and exposed anomalies requiring adjustment.

It was clear during the pilot interviews that the inherent flexibility was fruitful in enabling the interviewees to express their thoughts and interpretations of their own entrepreneurial leadership intentions and behaviours toward augmented growth in their SME. A more structured approach could have stifled the entrepreneurial leaders' freedom to discuss significant latent issues in more detail.

#### 3.9.4 Overview of the interview respondents

Table 3.10 shows interview respondents and number of employees

Interview number	Number of employees	Sector
1	0	Professional Services Consultant (Sport)
2	0	Professional Services Consultant (Human Resources)
3	0	Creative/craft Sector
4	0	Professional Services Consultant (Environmental)



5	0	Professional Services Consultant (Recruitment)
6	0	Haulage Consultant
7	0	Professional Services consultant (Health)
8	0	Professional Services Consultant (Leadership)
9	3	Tech SME
10	5	Professional Consultancy Services (Business)
11	1	Event Management Company
12	9	Financial Services SME
13	9	Baby products SME
14	9	Restaurant/Bar
15	20	Financial Services SME (Wealth).
16	21	Café Chain
17	32	Restaurant Bar
18	50	Independent Hotel Belfast
19	200	Bar Chain
20	0	Professional Consultant – Business

Table 3.10 Interview respondents and number of employees

### 3.10 Methodology for data analysis

#### 3.10.1 Quantitative data analysis

The questionnaire data was collected and then the quantitative data analysis began. This entailed entering the data from each questionnaire into the IBM SPSS V25 software tool. Statistical analysis identified descriptive and categorical variables and the use of Chi Squared and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used as two nonparametric tests to uncover comparisons, associations, and correlations between the variables. The non-parametric tests were used because of the unequal distribution of the variables in

relation to business size, the small sample size in relation to population and the nominal and ordinal categories in the responses.

Chi-square test is applicable when qualitative variables are classified into categories. It is a nonparametric statistical test to determine if two or more categories of the samples are independent or not (Zibran, 2007). "The most common use of the test is to assess the probability of association or independence of facts" (Maxwell, 1971 p.1). To explain this further, the purpose of this test is to determine if there is a relationship or not between the variables studied. For this research, the test is whether there is a relationship (or not) between individual entrepreneurial leaders' responses in relation to SME growth.

The Kruskal-Wallis test by ranks is a nonparametric method used for comparing two or more independent variables (entrepreneurial leaders) of different sample sizes (3 categories of SME size: 0-employees: 1-9 employees and 10+employees). "One of the most important applications of the Kruskal-Wallis test is in detecting differences among the population means" (Kruskal and Wallis, 1952 p.583). To explain this further in relation to this research, it is about testing for any significant difference in response from individual entrepreneurial leaders depending on the size of the business. All the respondent's usable data (n=204) was uploaded to SPSS v25.

### 3.10.2 Qualitative data analysis

Before the interviews began, the researcher asked the participants to return the requested interview consent document (Appendix 4). The interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams, and these were transcribed and uploaded into Nvivo12. A thematic analysis approach was adopted as the method for analysing the qualitative data collection. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), thematic analysis is defined as a process of identifying and analysing themes or patterns in qualitative data. Moreover, the use of the explanatory sequential approach facilitated the inductive approach in the stage 2 data drawing on the analysis of deduction at stage 1. This also facilitated the transition from the description to identifying and analysing

any themes or patterns in the data found from the in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis also provides meaning and understanding of data from personal experiences that is drawn from identified understandings in the quantitative analysis. This pragmatic approach toward analysing the data was also aligned with the researcher's philosophy for this research. Nvivo 12 was used to assist with the analysis of the qualitative to classify and cluster words to extend the knowledge of thematic data analysis (Dollah et al., 2017; Zamawe, 2015). Appendix 9 compliments this process and explains why the questions were asked based on the analysis of the stage one questionnaire survey.

In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2021) there are six phases in thematic analysis. Firstly, the researcher familiarising themselves with the data by reading and re-reading and noting down initial ideas. Secondly, generating initial codes and linking to interesting elements of the data and collating data relevant to each code. Thirdly, searching for themes in the transcription of the analysis and gathering data relevant to each theme. Fourthly, checking and reviewing the themes and generating a thematic map aligned to the conceptual framework to guide the researcher in their thinking. The next element in the process is confirming through an on-going analysis of the themes and generating clear categories. Finally, to review and analyse selected extracts and produce a scholarly report of the themes in the qualitative analysis chapter 5.

The researcher analysed the material through the six phases and divided the findings into nodes and child node themes. The first level statements were nodes and are descriptive, emerging from the raw data and standing as a starting point of the data analysis process. Second level child nodes were then coded from the clustering of first level data and represent the conceptual elements of what the participants thought and spoke about as social constructs (eg investing in people, knowledge of sustainability). From this the four key themes (A-D) were identified under nodes and child nodes.

To highlight the relationship between data and interpretation live quotations were extracted. In chapters 5 and 6, direct quotes from entrepreneurial leaders are illustrated using the following process:

- 1) Dots “...” were used if speech was excluded
- 2) Brackets and the interview number (1-20) was used after each quotation e.g. (Interview No.1).
- 3) During the analysis care was taken to ensure there is an even spread from all the participants.
- 4) (X) was used for participant confidentiality if appropriate.

### 3.10.3 Integration of the Data Analysis

This research conducted separate analysis in the first instance and afterwards, integrated the data following Creswell and Creswell (2017) explanatory mixed methods analysis. The numerical and statistical quantitative data therefore formed a basis from which the qualitative data could be explained and vice versa. Integration of data analysis is explained in the discussion in chapter six, comparing this to theoretical concepts from the literature review chapter 2. This shows increasing synthesis from the Stage 1 (Quantitative analysis SPSS V25) and Stage 2 NVivo 12. Using analysis node and child node constructs the findings explore the entrepreneurial leaders generation of augmented SME growth. Creswell and Creswell (2017) explain that quantitative data requires quantitative analysis and qualitative data will require qualitative analysis. As this study utilised a sequential explanatory design, the analysis required a format of sequential data analysis and then an integration of data analysis, known as the integration phase (Creswell and Clark, 2017).

As a recap, the stages in the sequential analysis of data in this research study are;

Stage 1 - Quantitative data analysis - IBM SPSS v25

Stage 2 – Qualitative analysis – NVivo 12

Stage 3 – Integration of the Quantitative and Qualitative data through triangulation of results

(Adapted from Creswell and Clark, 2017 p.143)

### 3.10.4 Stage One - on-line survey data analysis

The on-line questionnaire data were collected and then the quantitative data analysis began. This entailed exporting the data from Qualtrics into the IBM SPSS V25 software

tool. The statistical analysis was used to identify descriptive and categorical variables. Chi Square along with the Kruskal-Wallis tests were utilised along with other relevant statistical analysis tools to find associations and relationships between the variables.

#### 3.10.5 Stage two - interview data analysis

A thematic analysis approach was adopted as the method for analysing the qualitative data collection. Thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2021) provides meaning and understanding of data from personal experiences that is drawn from identified understandings in the quantitative analysis (McMahon, 2007; Creswell and Clark, 2017). Using NVivo12 assisted in shaping and understanding data and in developing and testing theoretical assumptions about data. The interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams and then uploaded to software called Panopto ([www.panopto.com](http://www.panopto.com)) to convert the recordings to captions, that the researcher edited, and then imported into NVivo 12. From this pre-set key themes (Clarke and Braun, 2021) were identified deductively from the quantitative analysis and then codes were created inductively as themes/patterns in the data emerged. It was anticipated that the themes formed were aligned to the aim and objectives of the research study.

#### 3.10.6 Stage three - integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Bryman (2007) argues that sound integration in mixed methods research provides the scenario where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and this is also supported by Creswell and Creswell (2017). There is clear evidence that explanatory sequential research design and outcomes are applauded by scholars in business research (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Small, 2011; Cameron et al., 2015 and Matos et al., 2019) that enables a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Cameron et al., 2015) particularly for the “how and why” (Matos et al., 2019). Finally, it is noted that integration of mixed methods data can deliver, “greater sophistication to the leadership research community in the understanding of this social phenomena...and real-world social problems” (Yawson, 2016 p.274).

### 3.11 Computer software

IBM SPSS Version 25 Quantitative analysis and NVivo 12 software (Qualitative analysis) was used for entering, managing, analysing, and presenting the findings of this research. Babbie et al. (2018 p.6) argue that “in social science research the empirical relationships predicted by theory must be tested...the focus is therefore on relationships between variables”. SPSS is a software package and one of the most popular statistical packages for social science research, it is user friendly and can perform highly complex data analysis. SPSS can take data and generate reports, charts and plots of distributions and trends, descriptive statistics and conduct complex statistical analyses if required.

NVivo 12 was selected to analyse the qualitative data since there were 20 interviews each of which were 45 minutes, and it is user friendly to organise and manage the data with a clear coding structure that can help in the creation of themes. King (2004 p.263) endorses NVivo as a method of data management and argues that “software such as NVivo is invaluable in helping the researcher index segments of text to particular themes, to link research notes to coding, to carry out complex search and retrieve operations, and to aid the researcher in examining possible relationships between the themes”. Overall, the software programmes were both selected because of their flexibility and agility in analysing the research data.

### 3.12 Chapter summary

The research methodology for this thesis has been explained and justified to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. The study followed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Ivankova et al., 2006) whereby the quantitative outcomes (stage one) and subsequent analysis identified associations in the variables. Stage two explored the variables further through qualitative interviewing techniques with the entrepreneurial leader to reveal a deeper understanding, contributing to entrepreneurial leadership research (Saunders et al. 2019). Bryman (2007) argues that sound integration in mixed methods research provides the scenario where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The research philosophy used pragmatism supporting a mixed

method approach and is therefore aligned to the use of abduction for knowledge generation and modification of theory.

The methodology literature establishes research methods to represent different layers of an onion (Saunders et al., 2019) leading to a central point of required 'methods' to ensure a research study is impactful. Figure 3.1 illustrates the outline structure of the methodological design for this research project.

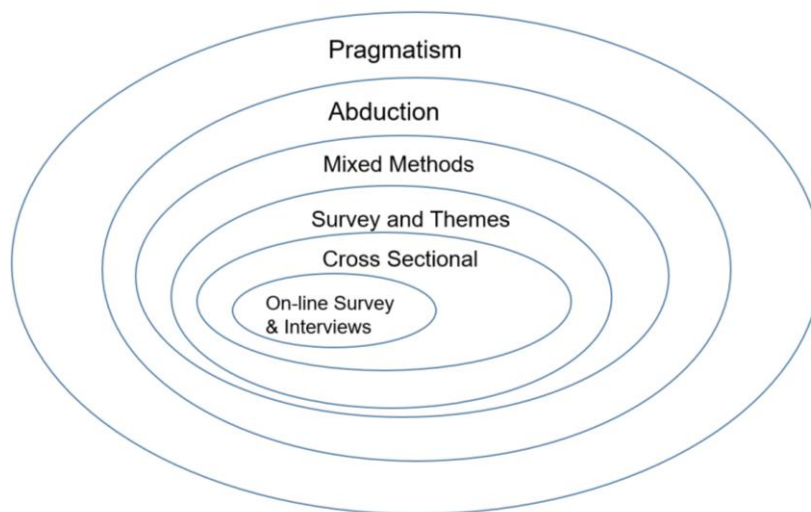


Figure 3.1 The research onion adapted from Saunders et al. (2019) and developed for this research

The reason the quantitative data was collected first was to increase the generalisability of the research findings and mitigate for bias. Quantitative data obtained a representative sample and facilitated the opportunity to further explore contradictions and discrepancies from the survey results, through qualitative interviews. This process also enabled the researcher to assess the validity and reliability of the research findings (Hessie-Biber, 2010). The quantitative data was analysed statistically (SPSS, v25) in the first instance and enhanced through the personal views of entrepreneurial leaders through semi structured interviews. This provided a more complex review and understanding of the entrepreneurial leaders lived experiences (McMahon, 2007). Table 3.11 below summarises the research approach.

Research Philosophy /Strategy	Process	Approach to data analysis/theory building
Pragmatism	Mixed Methods	Theory modification
Literature Review (Secondary Research)	Systematic followed by non-systematic literature review	Abductive
Stage 1 - Quantitative Data Collection	Web based Survey n=204 (Cross Sectional)- Qualtrics (non-random through snowballing respondents).	Deductive
Stage 2 - Qualitative Data Collection selected from questionnaire.	Select 20 'self-selected' participants from the questionnaire respondents (non-probability sampling)	Inductive
Stage 3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative results	Interpretation and explanation of qualitative and quantitative results	Abductive

Table 3.11 Summary of research approach. Source: Developed for this research

Guided by the conceptual framework and following the explanatory sequential approach, the next chapter provides an analysis of the findings of the first research phase, the questionnaire. The quantitative data analysis contributes to the first research objective and examines the variables and relationships between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth, principally in economic and social terms.



## Chapter 4 Quantitative Research Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth. The research question asks, do entrepreneurial leaders generate augmented SME growth? Augmented SME growth combines the components of economic and social growth and arguably is enabled purposively by entrepreneurial leaders. To fully answer the research question and achieve research objectives one, two and three, it is essential to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership and the generation of augmented SME growth.

This chapter contributes to the first and second research objectives and analyses the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth, principally in economic and social terms. Guided by the conceptual framework and following the explanatory sequential approach, the chapter provides an analysis of the findings of the first research phase, the quantitative survey. It will also inform the design of phase two of the explanatory sequential approach, namely the qualitative interviews.

The chapter will begin by indexing a summary of the survey findings including descriptive data that relates to the context of Northern Ireland, as this is the region from where the data is collected. Hence, a table providing a summary of the quantitative survey findings and descriptive data sample from Northern Ireland SMEs can be found in Appendix 8 and 8a. The chapter will then evaluate the descriptive data from the sample context within the Northern Ireland region. Following this, the contextual descriptive data on the entrepreneurial leader sample will be reviewed (4.4) leading to an analysis of the lifestyle values, perceptions and intentions of the SME entrepreneurial leader (4.5). The findings will then be analysed on the entrepreneurial leader and their pursuit of economic growth (4.6). Following this an analysis on the importance of entrepreneurial leaders enabling social growth in SMEs will be conducted (4.7), finishing with an analysis of entrepreneurial leaders enabling social growth through their employees (4.8).

## 4.2 Data collection and summary of findings

A Qualtrics anonymous on-line questionnaire was designed (Appendix 1) and the link emailed to 98 business contacts on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021. The contacts were the business networks of the researcher and hence convenience sampling was the method used to distribute the survey. The email requested that the recipient share the survey link with a minimum of one other contact who was an entrepreneurial leader of an SME. The process of snowball sampling helped facilitate a sectoral and geographically diverse sample of respondents. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial leader's role was deemed to be founder owner, managing director or shareholder of an SME that employed from zero to 249 employees in Northern Ireland. A screening question was used in the questionnaire design to ensure only entrepreneurial leaders completed the survey. It was assumed that the SMEs entrepreneurial leader is a key decision maker in generating augmented SME growth. A summary of the quantitative findings are found in Appendix 8.

## 4.3 Descriptive data - Northern Ireland SME context

### 4.3.1. Geographical representation

Northern Ireland has 11 Council areas, and the one most densely populated is Belfast City Council. Chart 3.1 shows a bar chart of the geographical distribution of the sample survey responses.

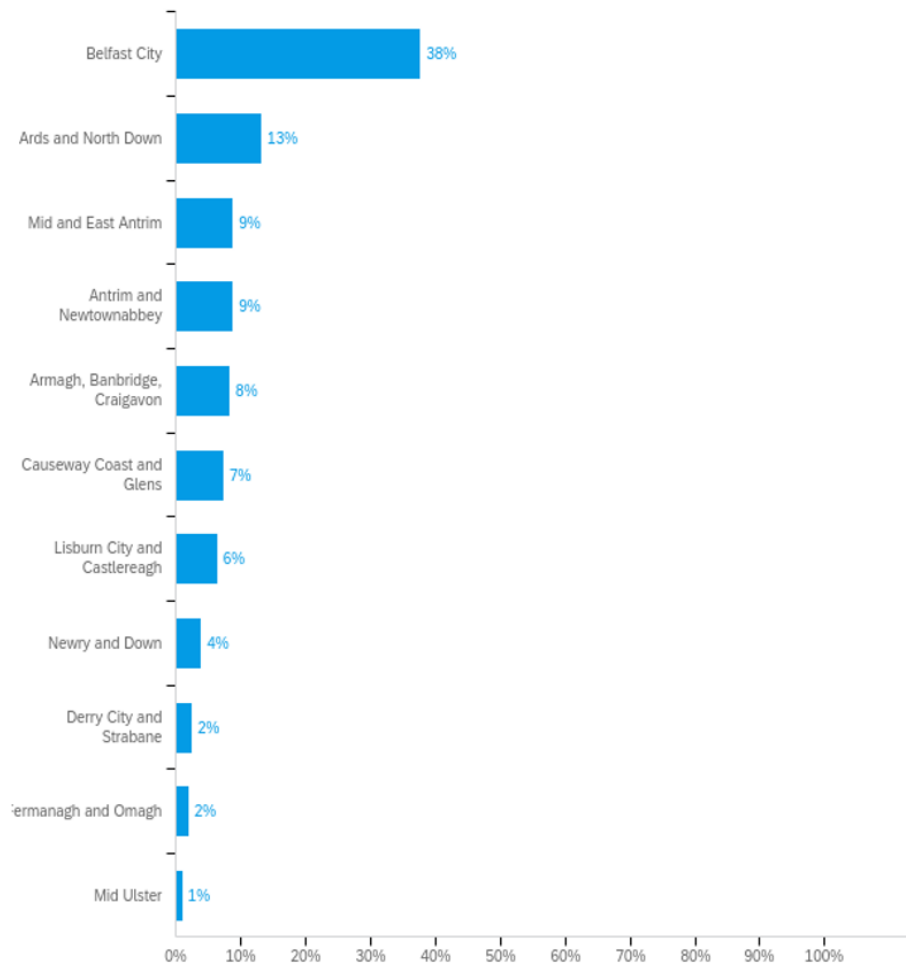


Chart 3.1 Geographical location of survey responses

#### 4.3.2 Age of SME

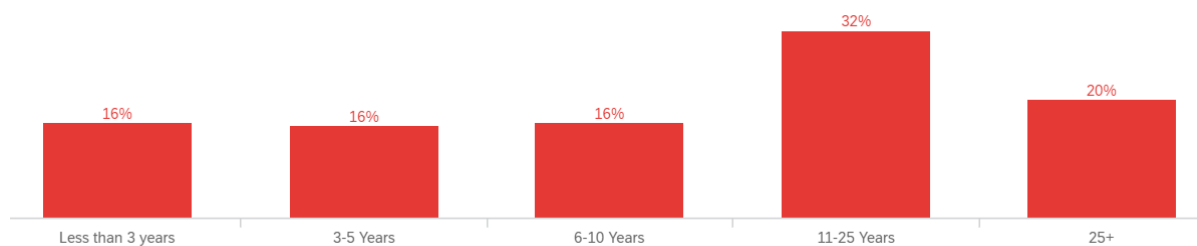


Chart 4.1 SME age of survey response

Chart 4.2 indicates that over half (52%) of SMEs in the sample had been established for more than 10 years, with 20% of these for more than 25 years. 48% of the sample were SMEs less than 10 years old. Overall there was good representation of businesses in the sample across the number of years the SME had been in business.

### 4.3.3 Annual turnover

Annual turnover of the sample of SMEs reveals interesting results as shown in the Chart 4.3 below.

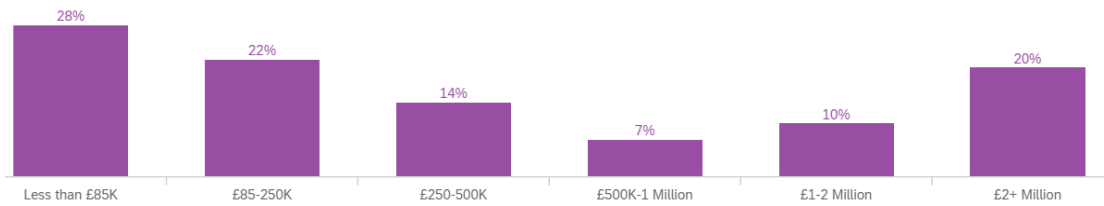


Chart 4.2 Annual turnover of survey responses

It is notable that 20% of businesses had over £2 million turnover, however 64% of businesses had less than £500K turnover with 28% of businesses having less than £85K and below the VAT registration threshold (one person businesses).

### 4.3.4 Family business

In terms of constitution, just under two fifths (39%) of the survey sample were family businesses illustrated in Chart 4.4 below.

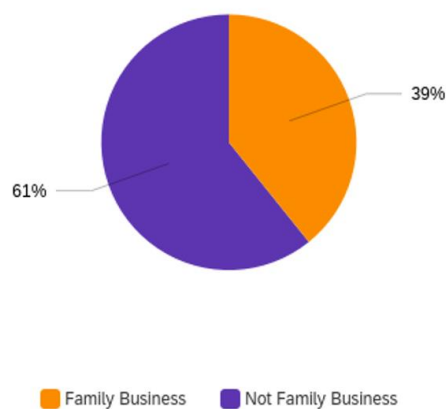


Chart 4.3 Survey profile of family and non-family SMEs

### 4.3.5 Size of SME

To establish the size of SME from the sample of survey respondents, chart 4.5 below shows the 5 categories that could be selected during survey completion.

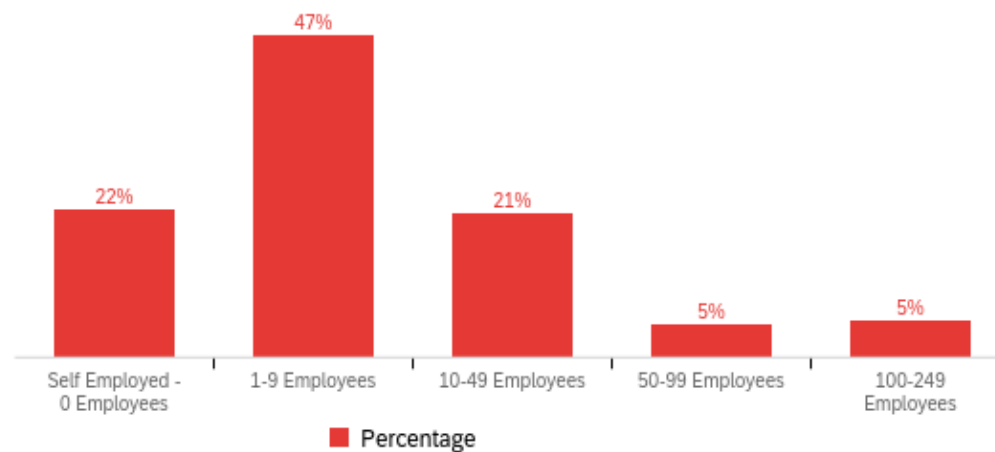


Chart 4.4 SME size of survey responses

The issue that arose from the respondent data was that two of the categories (50-99 employees) and (100-249 employees) did not have enough responses to represent the individual categories, or to warrant viable sub-category analysis. This meant that statistical testing would be challenged and could provide invalid results, often referred to as a violation of assumptions typically found in non parametric testing (Kruskal and Wallis, 1952). Thus, for this research the data categories were re-established into three categories. Table 4.2 below illustrates the revised assumptions for business size for this research where  $n=204$ .

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 employees - self employed	44	21.6	21.6	21.6
	1-9 employees	96	47.1	47.1	68.6
	10+employees	64	31.4	31.4	100.0
	Total	204	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.1 Revised assumptions for business size to aid statistical analysis

#### 4.4 Descriptive Data – The Northern Ireland entrepreneurial leader context

To ensure the survey was completed unequivocally by entrepreneurial leaders a screening question asked the potential participant if they were Owner/Founder, CEO, Managing Director, or a Shareholder. If respondents did not select any of these roles, they exited the survey.

##### 4.4.1 Entrepreneurial leader – role in the SME

Progressing from this question, participants were asked what best described their primary role in the business. The essential requirement was that survey respondents could influence decisions regarding SME growth. It is assumed that entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs are key decisions makers and depending on the size and structure of the business can be an owner founder, managing director or shareholder. Chart 4.6 below illustrates composition of participant respondents with 68% of the sample selecting owner/founder and 22% identifying themselves as managing Director/CEO. The remaining 10% were shareholders.

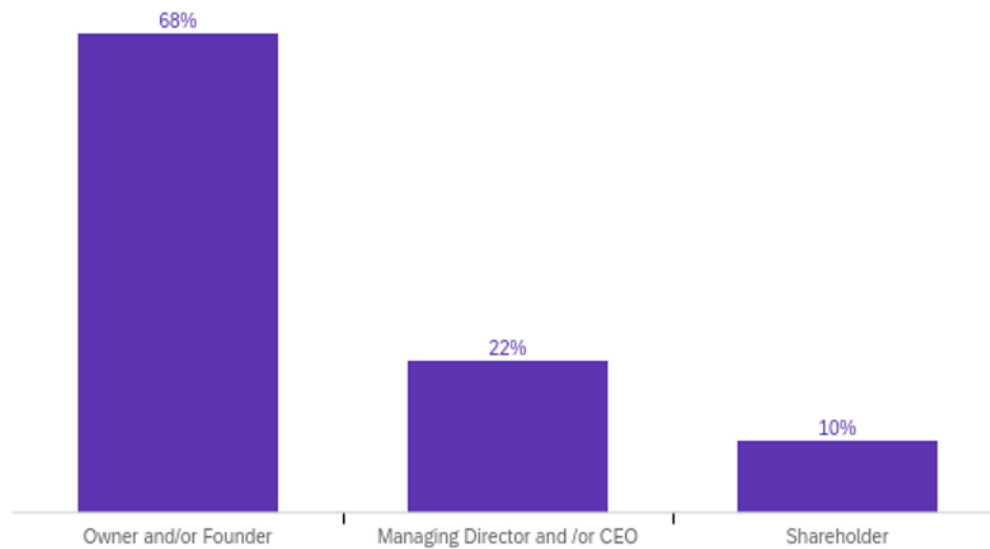


Chart 4.5 Role profile of participant entrepreneurial leaders

Following the screening question, all respondent roles tabulated have an influence on decision making in the SME and therefore assumed to be valid responses.

#### 4.4.2 Entrepreneurial leader – age profile

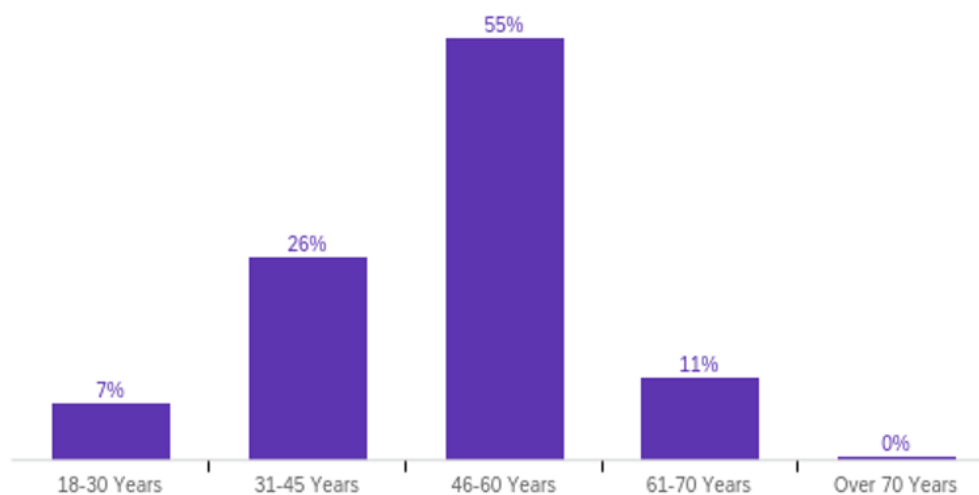


Chart 4.6 Age profile of participant entrepreneurial leaders

Chart 4.7 above shows the largest age group of leaders in the sample were the 46–60-year bracket at 55%, while a further quarter (26%) were in the 31–45-year-old bracket. Those in the 18-30 age range represented 7% of the survey responses.

#### 4.4.3 Entrepreneurial leader – gender

The gender profile of the respondents showed a higher proportion of male (61%) than female respondents (39%).

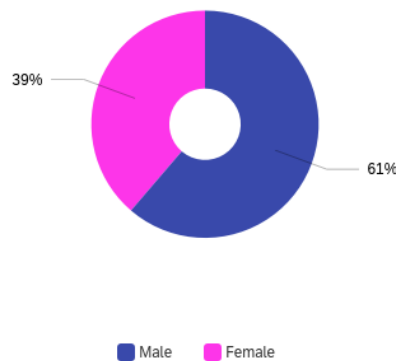


Chart 4.7 Gender profile of participant entrepreneurial leaders

Interestingly, the findings of this survey broadly reflect the Rose Review (2019) that one in three UK entrepreneurs are female.

#### 4.5 The lifestyle values, perceptions, and intentions of SME entrepreneurial leaders

##### 4.5.1 Introduction

To consider what influences an SME entrepreneurial leader's decision making, the survey explored their lifestyle values, perceptions, and intentions. It also explored how they preferred to be perceived by their local community and stakeholders. The ordinal Likert scale facilitated responses from extremely important to extremely unimportant. Chart 4.9 below illustrates the responses aligned to the relevant section narrative (4.5.2; 4.5.3; 4.5.4).



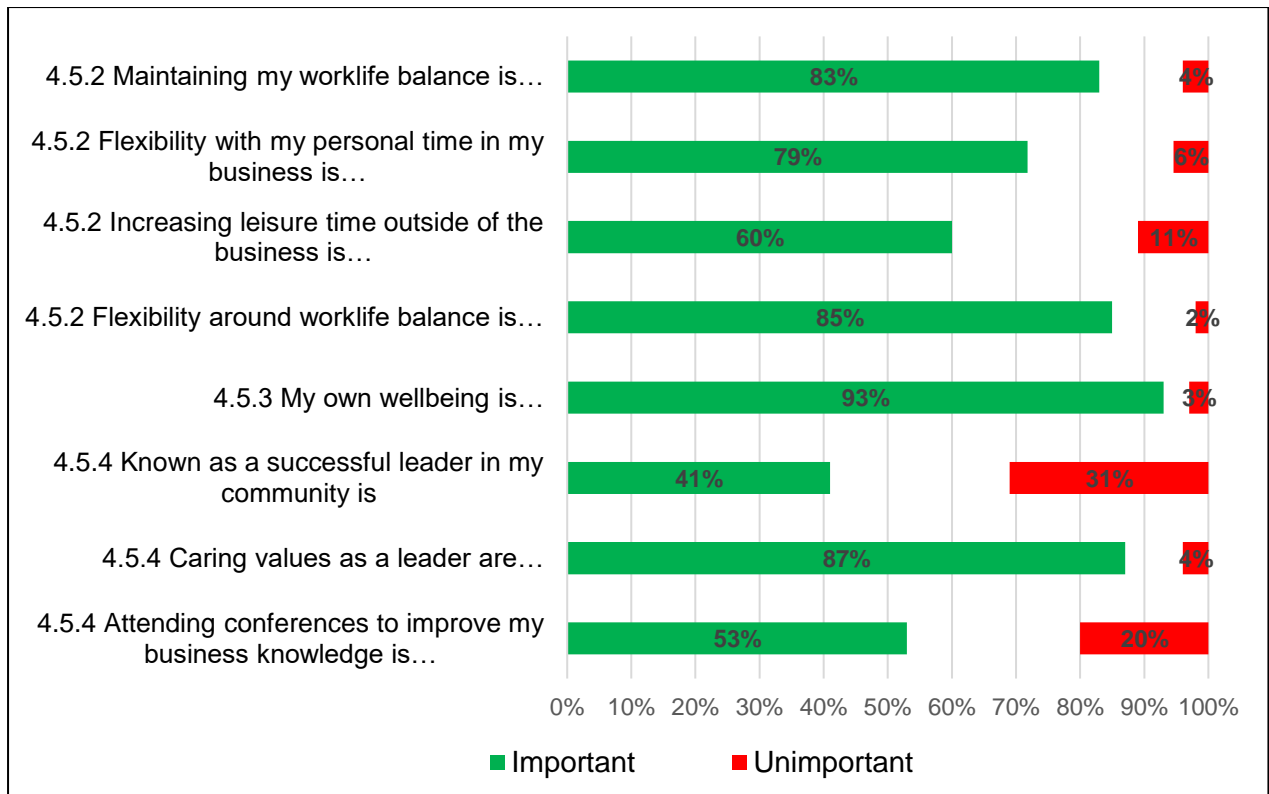


Chart 4.8 Summary of lifestyle values, perceptions, and intentions of SME entrepreneurial leaders

#### 4.5.2 Entrepreneurial leader lifestyle values

An ordinal Likert scale was used in the survey design to explore the lifestyle values of entrepreneurial leaders. Survey respondents could select from extremely important to extremely unimportant in a five-point scale. To facilitate more impactful visual clarity, this was refined to important and unimportant. From Chart 4.10 below individual bar charts identify each Likert statement and the collective response in percentages from entrepreneurial leaders.

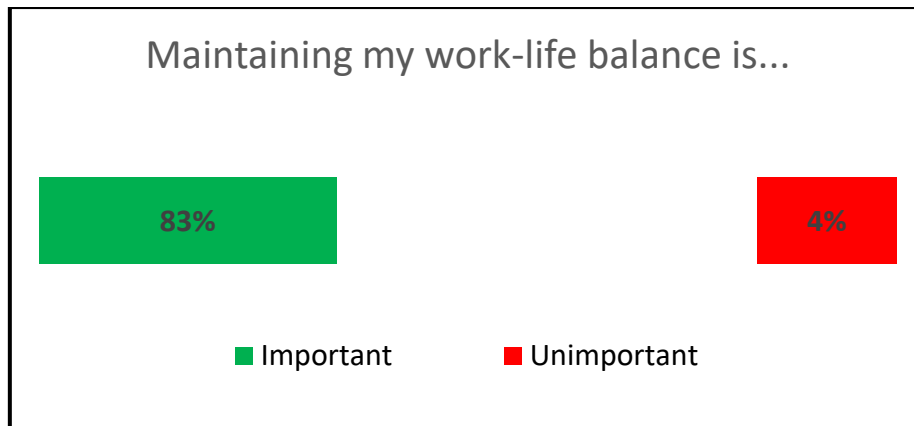


Chart 4.9 Importance of maintaining my work-life balance by SME entrepreneurial leaders

Chart 4.10 data indicates that the work-life balance was reported to be of importance to the entrepreneurial leaders, whereby 83% of respondents selected maintenance of work-life balance as important to their lifestyles.

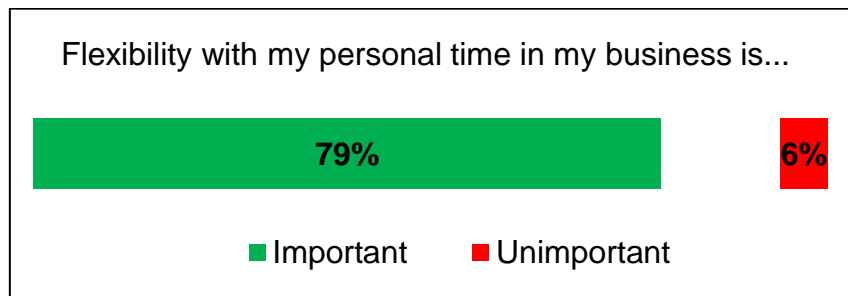


Chart 4.10 Importance of flexibility with 'personal time' in my business

The survey indicated that 79% chose flexibility as important when leading their business and managing their work life balance as illustrated on Chart 4.11 above.

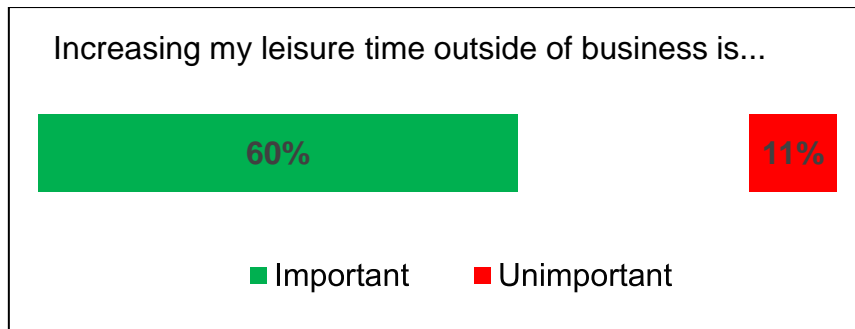


Chart 4.11 Importance of increasing leisure time outside of business by SME entrepreneurial leaders

Interestingly, Chart 4.12 indicated that a relatively smaller percentage, 60% of entrepreneurial leaders selected increasing leisure time outside the office as important to their lifestyles and 11% suggested it was unimportant.

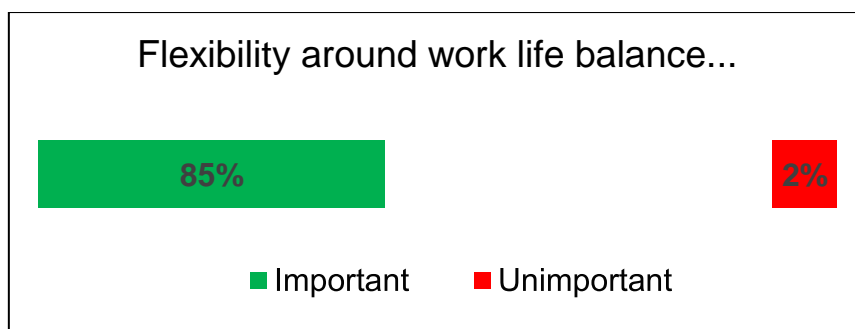


Chart 4.12 Importance of flexibility around work/life balance for entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs

Chart 4.13 shows responses on flexibility around work/life balance for both the leader and their employees. Here, only 2% of respondents thought this was unimportant and 85% selected important.

Overall, the results suggest that lifestyle values in relation to a balance in work and life are important to entrepreneurial leaders when leading their SMEs, with or without employees.

The Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric method used for comparing two or more independent variables (entrepreneurial leaders) of differing sample sizes (3 categories of SME size: 0-employees: 1-9 employees and 10+employees). To explain this further in relation to this research, it is about testing for any significant difference in responses

from individual entrepreneurial leaders (from differing sizes of SME) in relation to statements on their values regarding SME growth.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted on the following statements around the work life balance values as an entrepreneurial leader. The correlations showed no significant differences, suggesting a strong consensus of the importance of work-life balance to entrepreneurial leaders regardless of business size.

#### 4.5.3 Entrepreneurial leader wellbeing

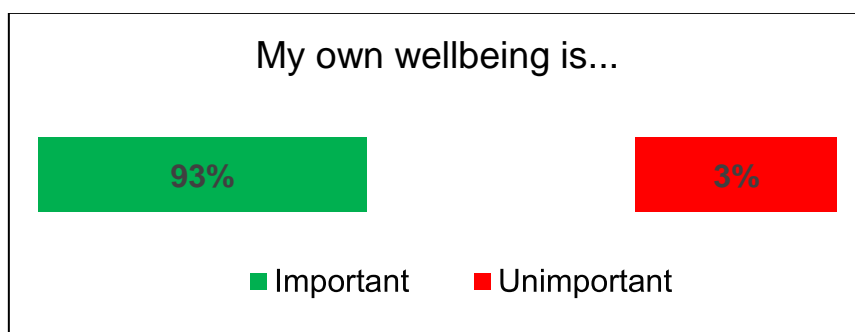


Chart 4.13 Importance of own wellbeing by entrepreneurial leaders

The survey evidenced in Chart 4.14 that personal wellbeing is important to SME entrepreneurial leaders with 93% rating this as important or extremely important and 3% stating that it was unimportant.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted to examine the associations between the three sizes of SME and values around wellbeing of entrepreneurial leaders. The results indicated no significant association between business size and 'importance of my own well-being' when leading an SME. This suggests personal wellbeing is important to all SME entrepreneurial leaders regardless of size.

#### 4.5.4 Entrepreneurial leaders and stakeholder perceptions.

The survey asked respondents to rank statements were extremely important to extremely unimportant regarding relationships with SME stakeholders. Chart 4.15

presents the data findings on the importance of 'being known (by stakeholders) as a successful business leader in the community'.



Chart 4.14 Importance of being known as a successful leader in my community.

The importance of 'being known as successful in my community' (stakeholders) was only selected by 41% of entrepreneurial leaders whereas the importance of stakeholder perceptions to being a 'caring' entrepreneurial leader was considerably higher with 87% indicating it to be either important or extremely important as indicated in Chart 4.16 below.

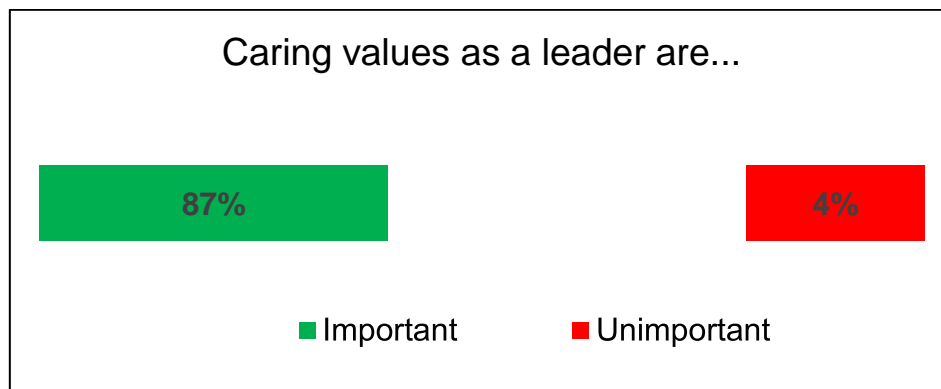


Chart 4.15 Importance of being perceived as a 'caring' leader in an SME

Just over half of the respondents believed that being 'knowledgeable' (through attending conferences) was an important perception of an entrepreneurial leader, illustrated in Chart 4.17.

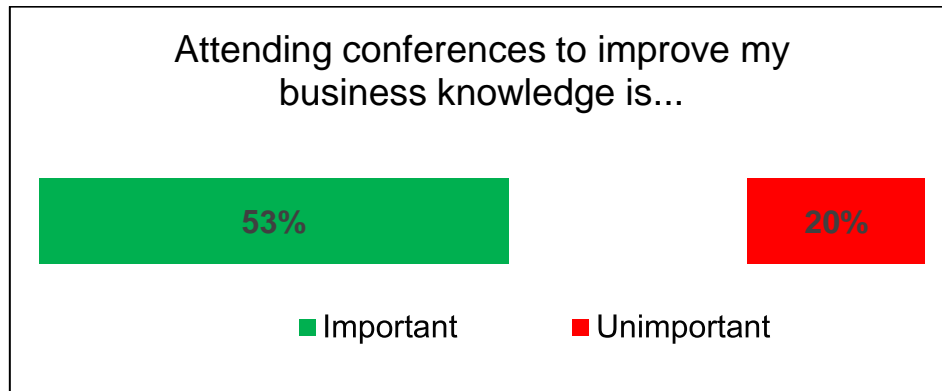


Chart 4.16 Importance of attending conferences to improve business knowledge

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted in on how the entrepreneurial leader would prefer to be perceived by stakeholders. There was no significant association between size of business and the importance of stakeholders and community perceptions of SME entrepreneurial leaders. The 'caring values as a leader' was the most important perception for SME entrepreneurial leaders from stakeholders and the community and to be known as 'successful' or 'knowledgeable' was less important.

In summary the results suggest that lifestyle values, work life balance, wellbeing and stakeholder perceptions are important to SME entrepreneurial leaders in relation to their decision making and the generation of the social element of augmented SME growth.

## 4.6 The Entrepreneurial Leader and economic growth in NI SMEs

### 4.6.1 Introduction

To explore the role of the entrepreneurial leader in generating SME growth in economic terms it was necessary to analyse the data to establish that economic

(financial) growth is a key priority of entrepreneurial leaders. The summary of the findings is illustrated in Chart 4.18 below.

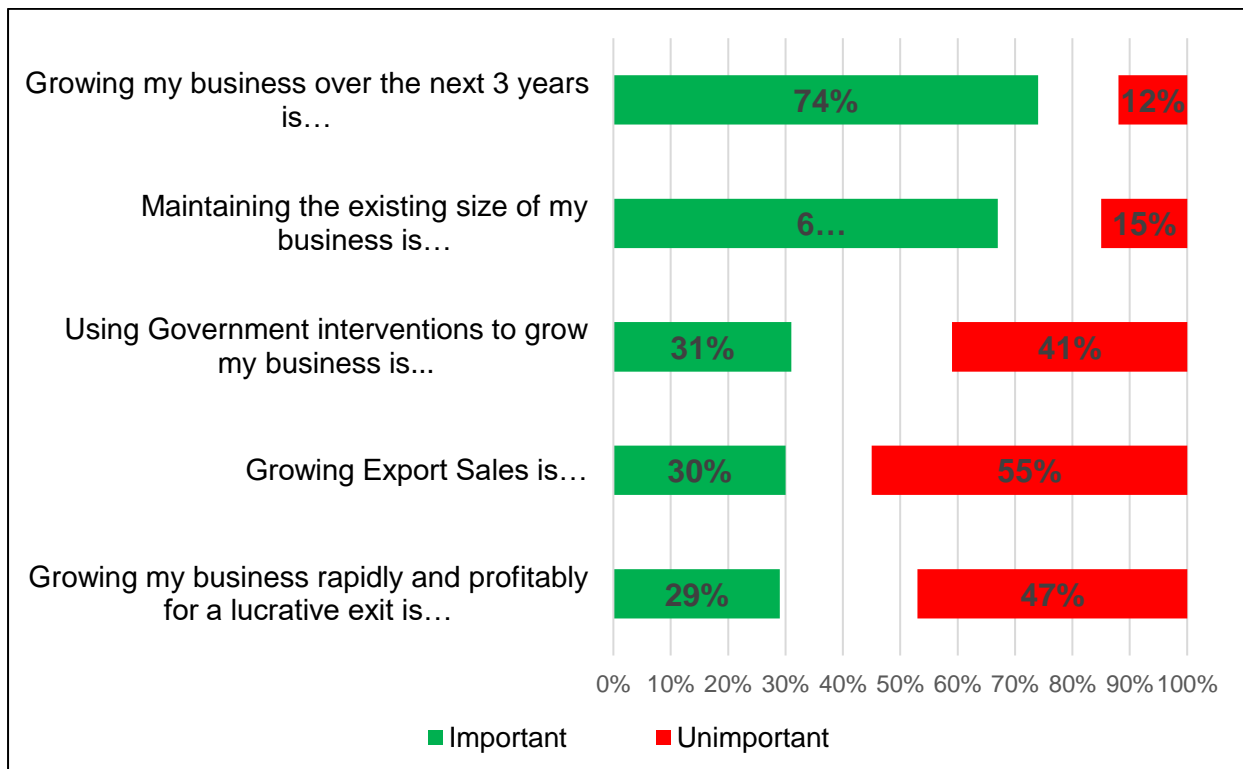


Chart 4.17 Summary of findings: The SME entrepreneurial leader and economic growth

#### 4.6.2 Importance of enabling economic SME growth

To examine the importance of commercial/economic growth, SME entrepreneurial leaders were asked to select between 5 Likert categories from extremely unimportant to extremely important and the findings are sequenced in the narrative below.

The survey responses showed that 74% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated growing their business was extremely important and 12% indicated it was unimportant or extremely unimportant. Chart 4.19 below illustrates the findings.

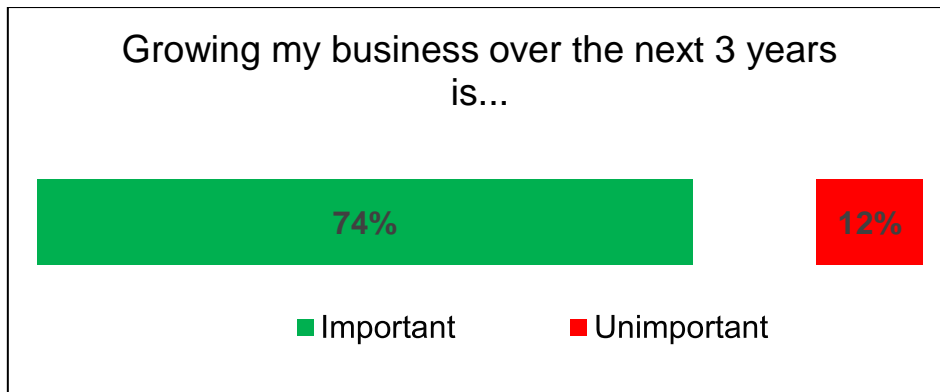


Chart 4.18 Importance of SME entrepreneurial leaders growing their business over the next three years

Importance to the entrepreneurial leaders of maintaining the size of the SME over the next three years is illustrated in Chart 4.20 and shows that 67% of SME entrepreneurial leaders ranked this as important or extremely important and 15% thought this was unimportant.

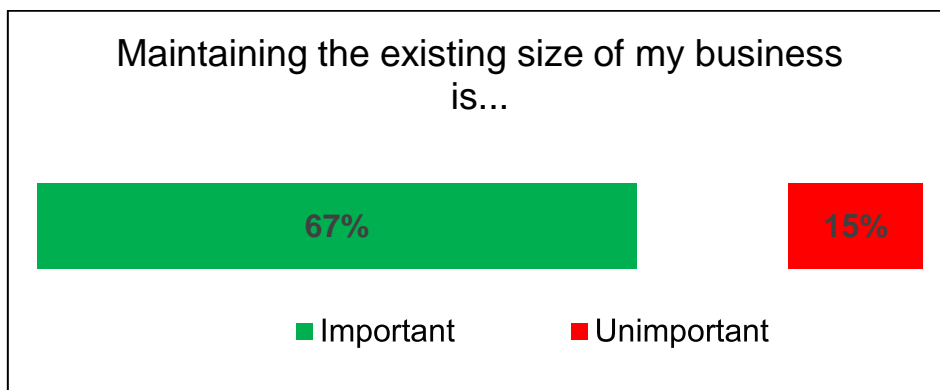


Chart 4.19 Importance to entrepreneurial leaders of maintaining the existing size of SME over the next 3 years

The importance of using government interventions to grow the business is summarised in Chart 4.21 below where 31% thought it to be important and 41% said it was unimportant. This might suggest a potential lack of awareness in government support mechanisms in the first instance for SMEs, limiting their perception of utilising these to stimulate growth.



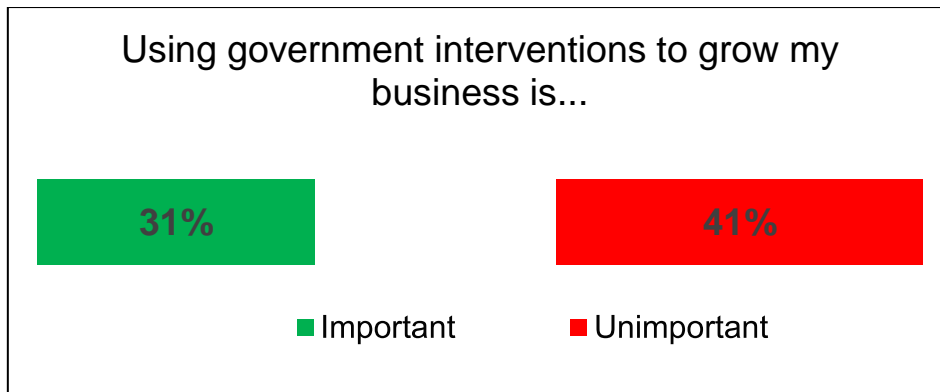


Chart 4.20 Importance of entrepreneurial leaders utilising government interventions to support their business over the next three years

Export sales also showed in chart 4.22 that 55% of SME entrepreneurial leaders surveyed ranked this as unimportant or extremely unimportant.

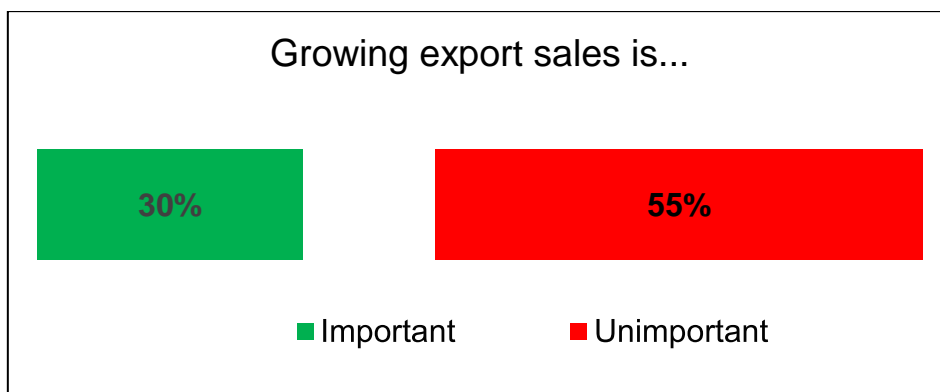


Chart 4.21 Importance for entrepreneurial to grow SME export sales over the next three years

However, for entrepreneurial leaders to grow their business for a lucrative exit, 29% indicated in chart 4.23 it was important and just under half (47%) said it was unimportant.

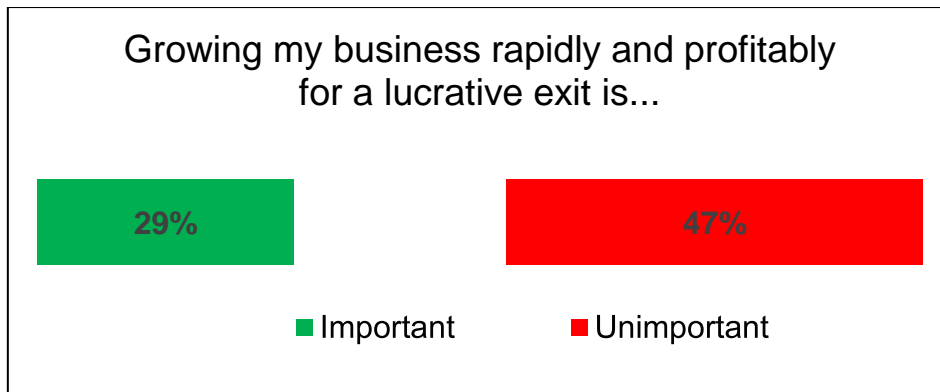


Chart 4.22 Importance of SME rapid growth for lucrative exit over the next three years

It is notable in the last three tables there is a high percentage of 'unimportant' responses in relation to SME growth intentions, in use of government interventions and exporting, that could indicate a lack of knowledge or interest. Regarding rapid growth for a lucrative exit, just under half of entrepreneurial leaders consider this to be unimportant in their business growth intentions, signalling the importance of sustaining the business in the longer term and the implications for work life balance.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted on how the entrepreneurial leader rated the importance of economic business growth. Table 4.3 below illustrates the results.

Statements on importance of economic business growth	Kruskal-Wallis Test	Significance
Growing my business is...	$\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 9.74, p = 0.008$	Yes
Maintaining the existing size of my business is...	$\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 3.94, p = 0.139$	None
Utilising Government interventions to support my business is...	$\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 5.73, p = 0.57$	None
Growing export sales is...	$\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 4.79, p = 0.091$	None
Growing my business rapidly and profitably for a lucrative exit is...	$\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 2.36, p = 0.306$	None

Table 4.2 Kruskal-Wallis Test SME size and expectation for SME growth

The tests showed there was no significance in four out of the five statements, however there was a significant difference between the three business sizes and the importance to SME entrepreneurial leaders' statement on 'growing my business'. In this statement, 'growing my business is...', the tests showed  $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 9.74$ ,  $P = 0.008$ . presenting a significant association between the sizes of business and the importance of 'growing my business'. The test suggests that although all three sizes of business groups had a median value of 4 (important), the 10+ employees group rated growing their business as statistically more important than the zero employees' group of SMEs.

#### 4.6.3 Obstacles to economic SME growth

To explore further the potential obstacles to business growth respondents were asked to select in order of rank the internal obstacles they perceived for their SME in the next three years.

Table 4.4 reveals that time pressure 'not enough time' (time poor) was the biggest obstacle with 38% of respondents selecting this as the most important. Therefore, one in three entrepreneurial leaders were limited by the amount of time to work on innovative projects that enabled further SME growth.

<b>Rank in order of importance the internal obstacles to your business growth in the next 3 years (Most Important = 4 - Least Important = 1)</b>				
<b>Rank</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Finance	29%	18%	23%	30%
Capability/Skills	21%	33%	29%	17%
Technology	12%	27%	32%	29%
Project Management (time pressures)	38%	22%	17%	24%

Table 4.3 Ranked importance of internal obstacles to business growth in next three years

Finance was selected as the second most important obstacle to business growth at 29%. Technology was seen as a relatively less important obstacle.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted regarding internal obstacles to business growth for these SME entrepreneurial leader groups. Table 4.5 below shows that for capability and skills as an obstacle showed a significance between the different SME group sizes as  $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 8.23, P = 0.016$ .

Please rank in order of importance the internal obstacles to your business growth? (1 =Least Important and 4 = Most Important) – Technology	Kruskal-Wallis Test	Significance
Finance	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 0.822$ $p = 0.663$	None
<b>Capability/Skills</b>	<b><math>\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 8.23</math></b> <b><math>p = 0.016</math></b>	<b>Yes</b>
Technology	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 0.729$ $p = 0.695$	None
Project Management (time pressures)	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 3.649$ $p = 0.161$	None

Table 4.4 Kruskal-Wallis Test SME size and internal obstacles to SME growth

This means that the capability and skills as an internal obstacle, showed that group one (0=employees) and group 3 (10+) employees were significantly different. The mean for group 1 = 2 and the mean for group 3 = 2.6. The significance suggests that capability and skills are more of a challenge for those entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs who have more employees as in group three.

### Impact of Brexit

Entrepreneurial leaders were also asked about the impact of Brexit on their SME growth. From the data in Chart 4.24 below, 29% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated that Brexit had a negative effect on their business, whilst 10% reported a positive effect. Significantly, almost half (44%) said that Brexit had a negligible impact and the

rest did not know at that point in time (17%). Chart 4.24 below illustrates the impact of Brexit on SMEs.

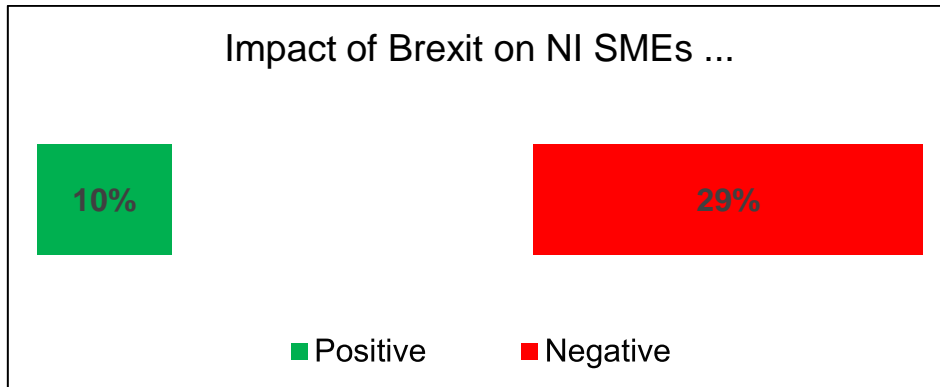


Chart 4.23 Impact of Brexit on NI SMEs

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed there was no significant association between business size and impact of Brexit suggesting the percentages above to be general to all SME entrepreneurial leaders regardless of business size.

#### Impact of Covid19

Entrepreneurial leaders were asked about the likely impact of Covid19 on their SME. Chart 4.25 below illustrates the findings.

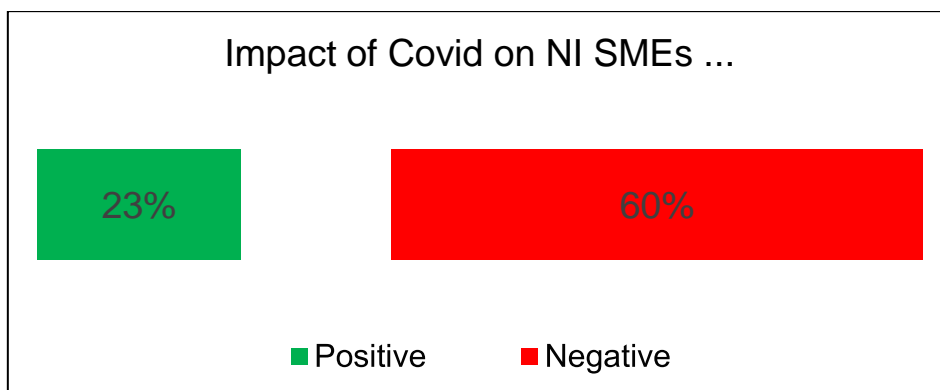


Chart 4.24 Impact of Covid19 on SME

Almost two-thirds of all respondents (60%) indicated a negative or extremely negative impact, whilst 23% suggested that Covid19 was currently having a positive impact on their business.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to the data collected on the current impact of Covid19. There was no significant difference in business size that shows the impact identified in the survey data is generalised across all business sizes in that 60% indicated a negative impact and 23% a positive impact.

#### 4.6.4 Priority measures for enabling economic SME growth - sales, profit, job creation

To explore the entrepreneurial leaders' priorities for SME economic growth in the next three years, entrepreneurial leaders were asked to rank in order of importance from a selection of SME growth metrics. The chart in 4.26 below illustrates the most and least important metrics for business growth selected by entrepreneurial leaders. Clearly the most important metric used to define business growth is profit (49%) followed by sales, then connecting with their local community.

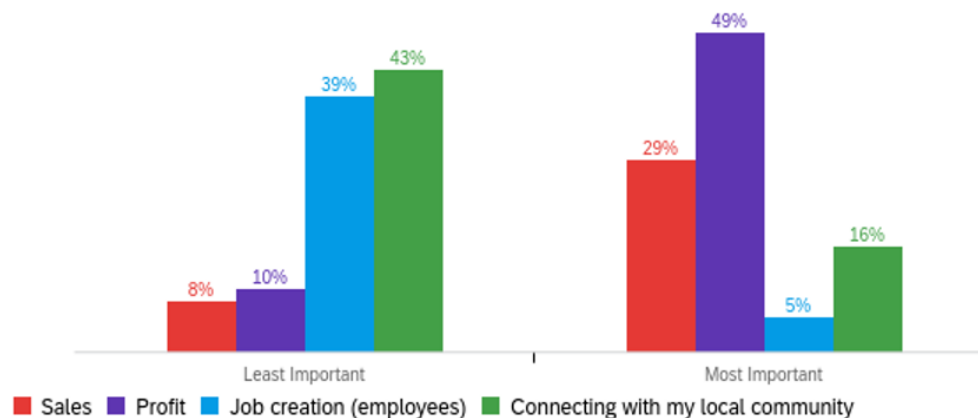


Chart 4.25 Most and least important metrics used by entrepreneurial leaders to measure SME growth

Only 5% of respondents regarded job creation as an important metric regarding SME growth for the next three years. This is an interesting finding considering that this is the key factor used in government reports to measure SME growth. Whilst connecting with the community was selected by entrepreneurial leaders as the least important growth metric (albeit with 43%), it is notable that 57% of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs did not rank it as least important, signalling a rising importance.

In conducting a Kruskal-Wallis Test on 'sales', there was no significance between the different sizes of business. Secondly the Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted on the ranking importance of profit in relation to size of business or between size of business and importance of profit so arguably there is no difference of agreement across all the entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs that profit is an important metric for business growth.

In terms of the impact of job creation on business growth and its relationship with business size as an important driver for business growth, the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was significance between two of the three groups and the rankings  $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 19.54, P = 0.001$ . Group 1 (0=employees) and Group 2 (1-9 employees) were significantly different in their perception of the importance of job creation. Those SME entrepreneurial leaders of businesses with no employees may find job creation as an unimportant meaning they do not determine measuring business growth through job creation. Alternatively, those SME leaders with 1-9 employees would find this a more important measure of SME growth.

The Kruskal-Wallis Test was also used to consider the importance of connecting with the community in relation to business size, as an important indicator for business growth. The tests showed that  $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 16.23, P = 0.001$  meaning there was a significant association between the sizes of business and their importance to connecting with the community. Group 1 (0=employees) and Group 2 (1-9 employees) were no different in their perception of the importance of connecting with the community reporting a mean of 2 (less important). Group 3 businesses (10+ employees) ranked connecting with the community with a mean score of 1 (least important). This could suggest that the larger the business the less likely entrepreneurial leaders are to see connecting with the community as a valuable measure of SME growth.

#### 4.6.5 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth

In examining the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth in economic terms, the participants were asked to select their primary intention regarding growing their commercial SME business in the next three years. This was directly in comparison to the last question that was applied to growth only for twelve months. To

be clear, sales and profit can grow without increases in employees. Chart 4.27 shows that 95% of SME entrepreneurial leaders in the sample intended to sustain and grow their SME in the next three years.

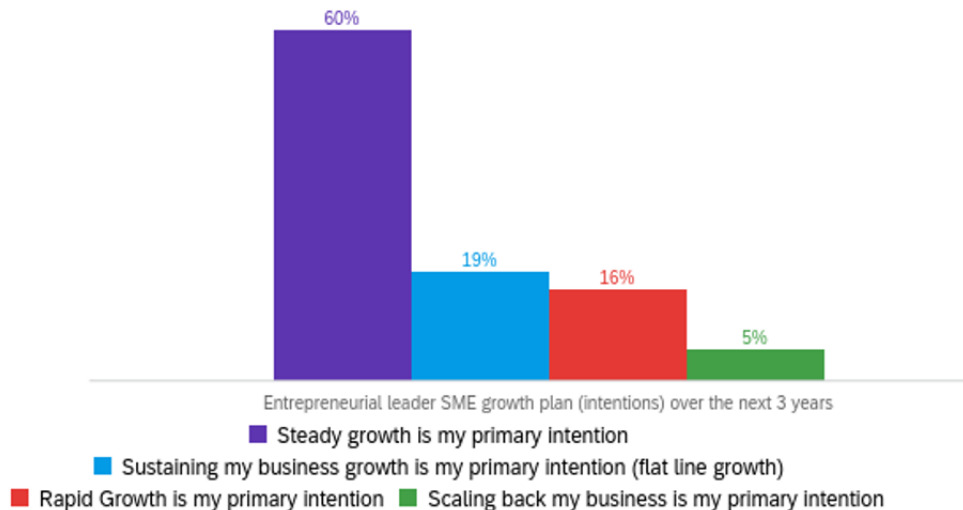


Chart 4.26 Entrepreneurial leader growth plan (intentions) in next 3 years

Exploring at a deeper level, steady growth was the most predominant intention of SME entrepreneurial leaders at 60%, with a further 16% indicating that rapid growth was the primary intention, meaning over three-quarters (76%) of SME entrepreneurial leaders intend to grow their business in the next 3 years. Around one in five (19%) of SME entrepreneurial leaders were content to sustain or 'flat line' their SME economic growth so therefore no significant economic growth. Interestingly, 5% of SME entrepreneurial leaders selected 'scaling back' their economic business growth as a primary intention in the next three years.

The relationship between size of business and entrepreneurial leaders' growth intentions was investigated using Chi-Square test for independence. Results showed that this was significant  $\chi^2(6, n = 204) = 32.525, P < 0.001, \text{Phi} = 0.399$ . Group 1 (no employees) reported scaling back more whereas Group 2 (1-9 employees) and Group 3 (10+ employees) reported more rapid growth.

Overall, the results suggest that businesses with no employees were more likely to scale back than those businesses that had employees. Businesses with no employees represented 14% of the SMEs surveyed. Therefore, it is arguable that the remaining



86% of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs have a primary intention to grow their business commercially in the next three years.

#### 4.7 Entrepreneurial leaders enabling social growth in NI SMEs

##### 4.7.1 Importance of enabling social SME growth

In attempting to determine the importance of enabling social growth, Likert questions were asked on the importance of engaging in community integration activities.

The Summary Chart 4.28 below shows the percentage of SME entrepreneurial leaders who rated the importance of engaging in a range of local community activities.

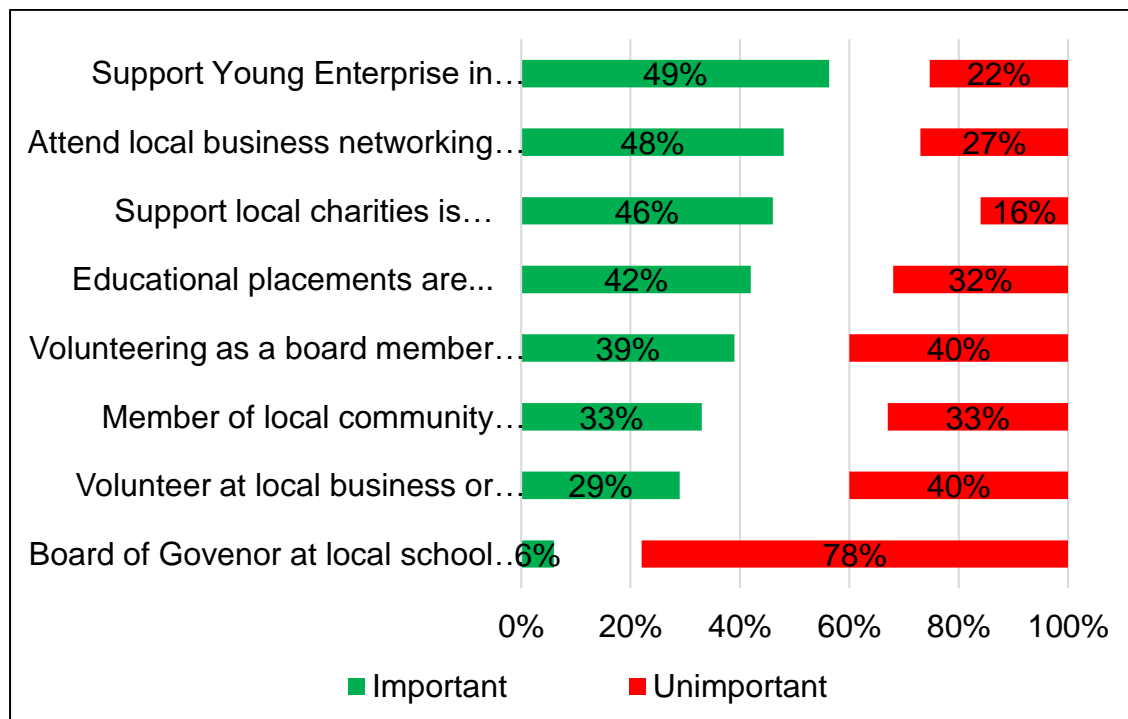


Chart 4.27 Importance of engaging in a range of community activities by entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs

Overall, the data shows that there was a relatively limited sense of intention for entrepreneurial leaders to engage in community activities in comparison to the economic intentions to SME growth. Interestingly, the primary community engagement activity for entrepreneurial leaders was in supporting young enterprise initiatives 49% followed closely by attending local B2B events at 48% of SMEs.

Supporting local charities was also selected as important by 46% of SME entrepreneurial leaders and 16% said it was unimportant, indicating that less SME entrepreneurial leaders said it was unimportant compared to the other activities.

Educational placements were seen as important by 42% of entrepreneurial leaders in the sample followed by volunteering as a Non-Executive Director (NED) by 39% of the respondents. That said, 40% of entrepreneurial leaders valued a NED role as unimportant. Board of governor at local school was also rated as unimportant by 78% of the NI entrepreneurial leader respondents.

The Kruskal-Wallis tests in Table 4.6 also showed there was only a significant difference in terms of educational placement for SME entrepreneurial leaders. Group 1 (no employees) and Group 3 (10+ employees) were significantly different, suggesting the larger SMEs saw educational placements as more important than those businesses with no employees.

Likert Question	Kruskal-Wallis Test	Significance
Attending local business networking events for my business is...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 1.21, p = 0.544$	No
Supporting local charities for fund raising...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 0.841, p = 0.657$	No
Support Young Enterprise initiatives...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 0.784, p = 0.676$	No
Member of local community groups...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 2.19, p = 0.33$	No
Board of governor at local school...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 0.96, p = 0.619$	No
<b>Educational placements...</b>	<b><math>\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 18.22, p = 0.001</math></b>	<b>Yes</b>

Table 4.5 Kruskal-Wallis test on significance of community activities and size of SME

#### 4.7.2 Community activities and enabling social SME growth

Question 16 in the survey explored to what extent entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs engaged in community activities or non-commercial goals by way of frequency for each option. Therefore, participants were able to choose more than one community activity that they engaged in. This was tested in the SPSS multiple responses test. Cumulatively, the 204 entrepreneurial leaders chose 510 activities that their business engaged in. Chart 4.29 below shows that the most popular community activity chosen by entrepreneurial leaders was sponsoring local charities at 51% and after that sponsoring local sports teams and community groups at 38%. The next largest and activity was attending local B2B events at 33%. On average entrepreneurial leaders engaged in 2.5 community activities whilst leading their business.

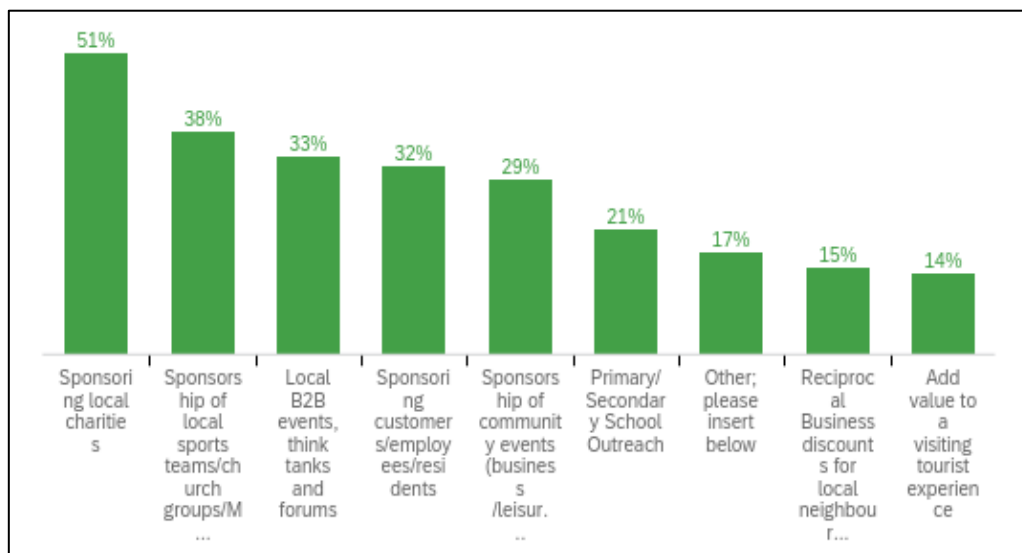


Chart 4.28 Types and level of engagement of entrepreneurial leaders in community engagement activities

Further analysis of business size groups and community engagement activities was completed using frequencies in SPSS v 25. Group 1 is zero employees; Group 2 is 1-9 employees and Group 3 is 10+ employees. Table 4.7 below shows the variables that were statistically analysed, the percentage of group size that engaged and a commentary on the findings.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>% Engaged</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Business Groups vs Primary/Secondary School Outreach	Group 1:15.9% Group 2:19.8% Group 3:26.6%	The data shows that 27% of the SMEs with 10+ employees engaged in school outreach. It notes significant engagement between all groups of SME entrepreneurial leaders and school's outreach.
Business Groups vs Sponsorship of local sports teams/church groups/Mums and Toddlers/Community Groups	Group 1:18.2% Group 2:31.3% Group 3:60.9%	Over 60% of 10+ employee SMEs engaged in sponsorship of local community projects and in the 1-9 category, one third of these SMEs engaged in these activities.
Business Groups vs Sponsoring customers/employees/residents	Group 1:13.6% Group 2:27.1% Group 3:51.6%	Just over half of the 10+ employees had reciprocal sponsorship with customers, employees, and residents. 27% of 1-9 employees engaged in reciprocal sponsorship activities/
Business Groups vs Local B2B events, think tanks and forums	Group 1:27.3% Group 2:33.3% Group 3:37.5%	A more even spread of the size of business and networking at local B2B events, think tanks and forums. The zero employees group engaged at a high level in these activities.
Business Groups vs Sponsorship of community events (business /leisure)	Group 1:15.9% Group 2:22.9% Group 3:48.4%	Just under 50% of the 10+ employees SME supported sponsoring local community events. In the 1-9 employee group 23% sponsored these events and a significant 16% engaged from the zero-employee group.
Business Groups vs Reciprocal Business discounts for local neighbouring business	Group 1:11.4% Group 2:16.7% Group 3:14.1%	The biggest proportion of SMEs that engaged in reciprocal business discounts was the 1-9 employee SME followed closely by the 10+. 11.4% of zero employees offered reciprocal discounts for local business.
Business Groups vs Add value to a visiting tourist experience	Group 1:22.7%	The highest percentage of SMEs engaging in enhancing the tourist experience was the

	Group 2:8.3% Group 3:15.6%	zero employees SME size at 22.7%. The lowest engagement in this sample was the 1-9 employees whereby only 8.3% of businesses engaged in this activity.
Business Groups vs Sponsoring local charities	Group 1:31.8% Group 2:45.8% Group 3:71.9%	SMEs with 10+ employees showed that 72% engaged in sponsoring local charities, followed by Group 2 (1-9 employees) at 46%. It is interesting to note that the SMEs with zero employees also contributed significantly to local charities.

Table 4.6 Business size groups versus community engagement activities

#### 4.7.3 Community relations and enabling social SME growth

To determine the entrepreneurial leaders' social enabling intentions to build and sustain community relations a Likert scale of questions was asked on the importance of building reciprocal relationships with their communities. Chart 4.30 summarises the SME entrepreneurial leaders' collective responses.

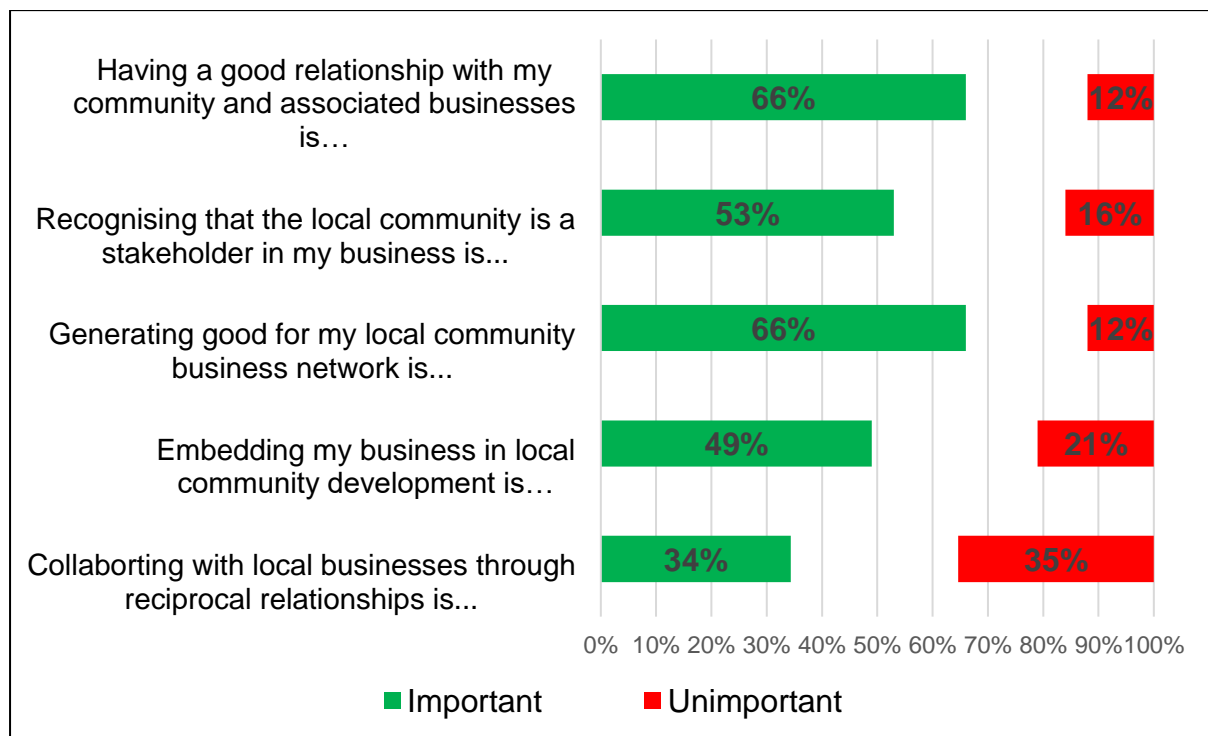


Chart 4.29 Summary: Community relations and enabling NI SME social growth

Chart 4.31 below shows the percentage of SME entrepreneurial leaders who rated the importance of building relationships within their community and business.

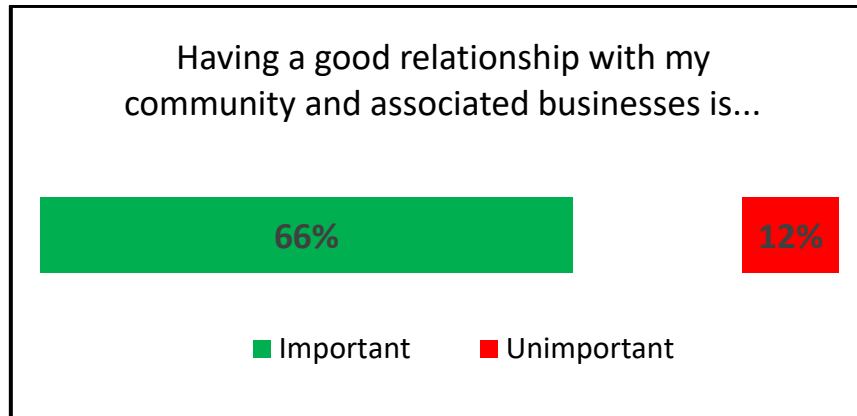


Chart 4.30 Importance of having a good relationship with my community

Chart 4.31 indicates that when the important and extremely important Likert choices are combined, almost two thirds (66%) of entrepreneurial leaders in this sample agreed the importance of having a good relationship with their local community. If the moderately important is added, it rises to 87% of entrepreneurial leaders agreeing that having a good relationship with the local community was important. At the other end of the scale 12% of entrepreneurial leaders believed it was unimportant (or unnecessary) to have a good relationship with the community.

Chart 4.32 below presents the importance for entrepreneurial leaders in recognising that their local community is a stakeholder in the business. This scored a combined important and extremely important score of 53%, rising to 84% when moderately important was included. This again shows that over half of the entrepreneurial leaders valued the importance of building community relationships within the area that their business resided.

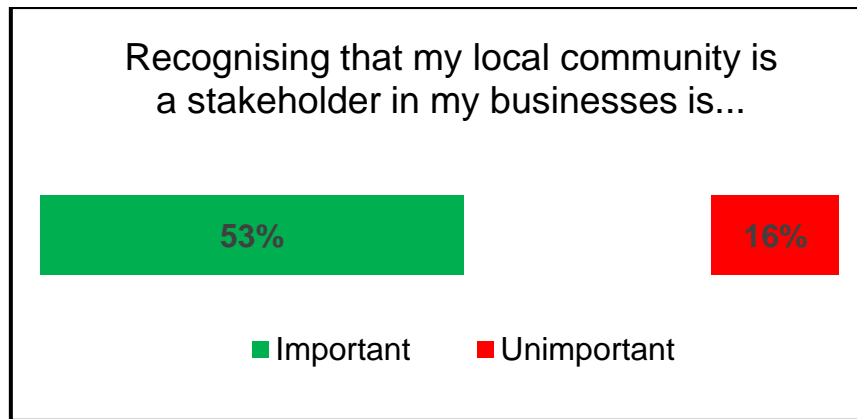


Chart 4.31 Recognising local community as stakeholders in my business

The bar chart 4.33 summarises the statement 'generating good for my local community business network'. In combining the two importance choices (45% and 21%) the results show a score of 66% raising to 89% when moderately important is added, showing that this and the last question were generating similar outcomes though asked at different times in the questionnaire.

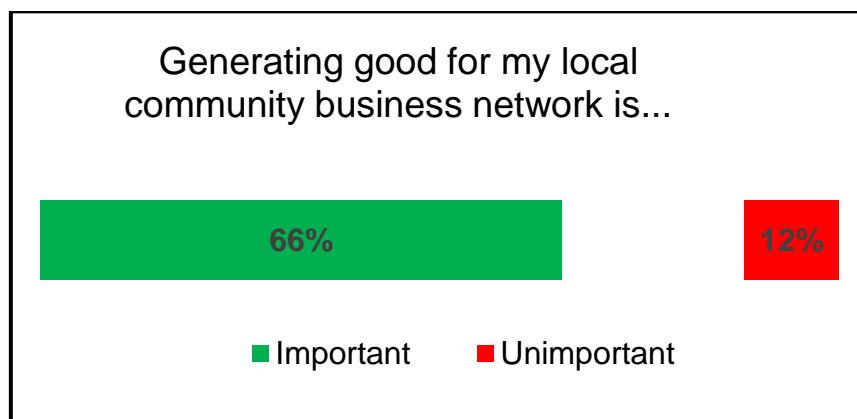


Chart 4.32 Importance of generating good for my local community business network

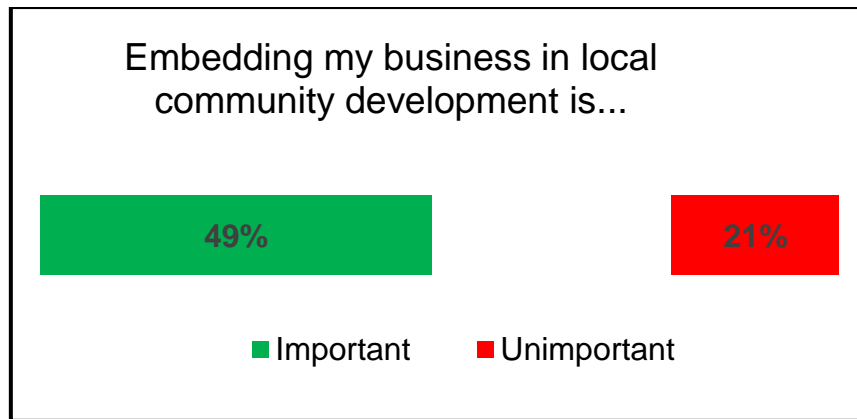


Chart 4.33 Importance of embedding my business in local community development

Chart 4.34 above shows the results of the importance of embedding their business in local community development activities, whereby 49% of entrepreneurial leaders saw value in engaging in these activities.

The bar chart 4.35 below shows the reported importance of entrepreneurial leaders in collaborating with local businesses through reciprocal sponsorship. Combining the extremely important and important values, 34% of entrepreneurial leaders valued this activity. However, 35% of SME entrepreneurial leaders rated reciprocal relationships with the community as unimportant.

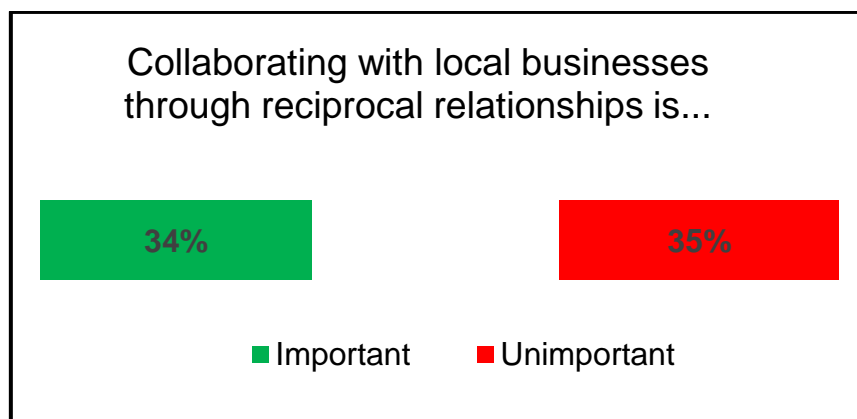


Chart 4.34 Importance of collaborating with local business through reciprocal relationships

Overall, the Kruskal-Wallis test suggests there is no significant association between the size of business and the SME entrepreneurial leaders enabling community



relationships. Arguably, this could be a sound sample of SMEs showing unity in the importance of building community relationships.

#### 4.7.4 Social responsibility and enabling social SME growth

To determine the entrepreneurial leader's social enabling intentions around the social responsibility and the sustainability agenda, Likert scale questions were asked on the importance of engaging in sustainability processes and procedures within their SME. Chart 4.36 below summarises the findings on social responsibility and entrepreneurial leaders' intentions and social SME growth in NI SMEs.

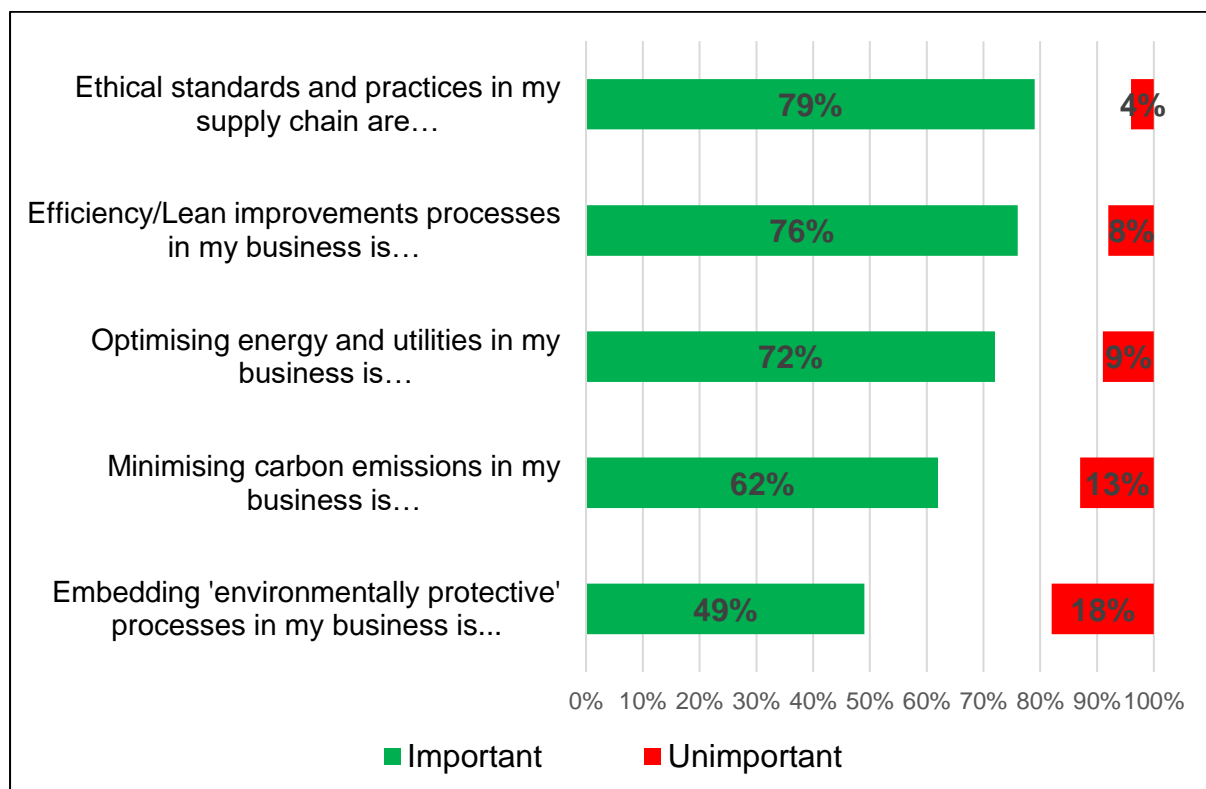


Chart 4.35 Summary of importance of social responsibility and SME social growth

Chart 4.37 shows that 79% of entrepreneurial leaders believed implementing ethical standards and practices in the SME supply chain was important.

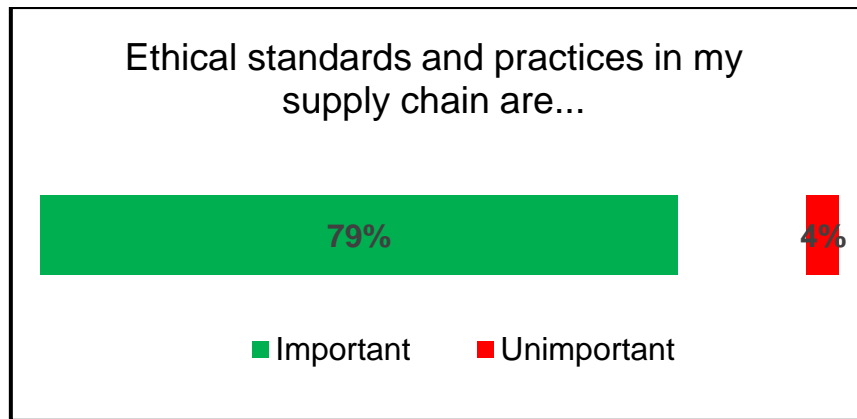


Chart 4.36 Importance of ethical standards and practices to entrepreneurial leaders in the SME supply chain.

This was followed by efficiency/lean improvement mechanisms, as presented in Chart 4.38 below, whereby, 76% of the entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs selected this to be an important activity for SME growth.

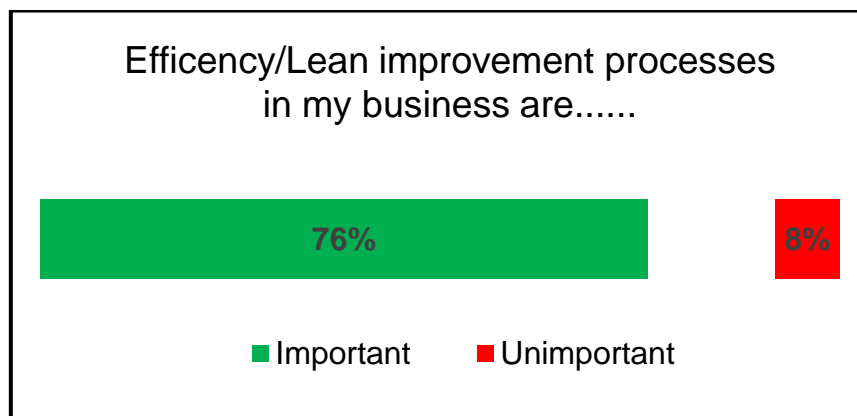


Chart 4.37 Importance of efficiency and lean improvement processes in the next 3 years.

Chart 4.39 below presents 72% of SME entrepreneurial leaders who considered optimising energy usage by way of embedding sustainability, to be important into SME operations.

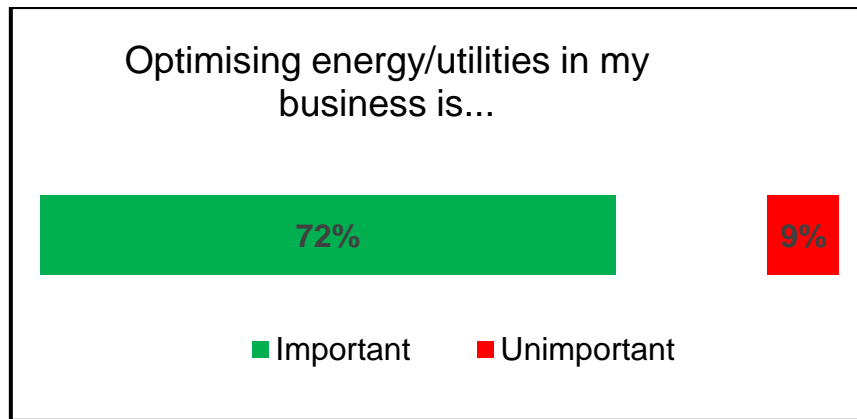


Chart 4.38 Importance of optimising energy/utilities in SMEs

Chart 4.40 presents further that 62% of entrepreneurial leaders considered it important to minimise carbon emissions in SME operations, whilst 13% alarmingly reported this as unimportant in their SMEs.

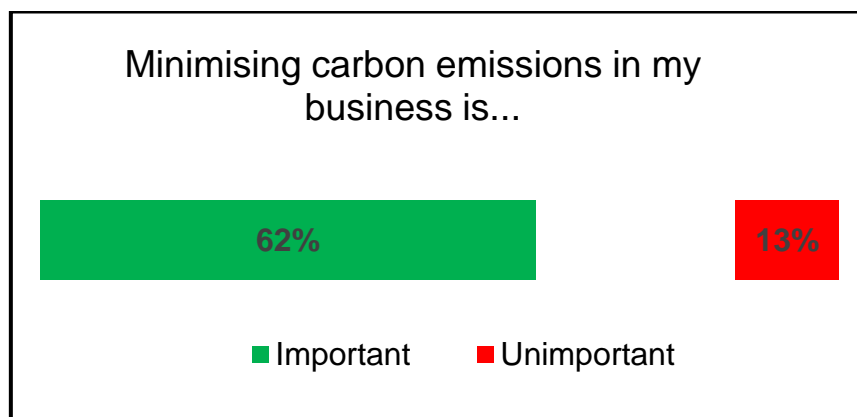


Chart 4.39 Importance of minimising carbon emissions in SME operations

Entrepreneurial leaders were also asked to respond to a statement on embedding environmentally protective processes into their business in a different section of the questionnaire, to test for validity of the previous questions. Interestingly, when singled out from the other embedding sustainability questions, only 49% ranked this as important in SME growth whilst 18% thought it unimportant. This is illustrated in Chart 4.41 below. This also indicates some misunderstanding of what embedding sustainability practices into SME operations means.

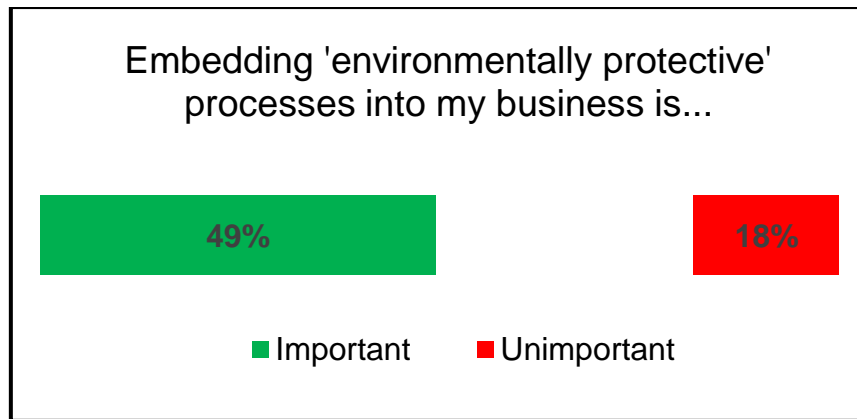


Chart 4.40 Importance of embedding environmentally protective processes into SME operations

The resultant Kruskal-Wallis Test in table 4.8 below, shows that the Efficiency/Lean improvement processes was the only significant variation. These showed where  $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 7.59, p = 0.02$  indicating that Group 1 (zero employees) and Group 3 (10+ employees) were significantly different. This suggests that larger SMEs are more likely to embed efficiency/lean improvements into their business.

Likert Question	Kruskal – Test	Significance
Ethical standards and practices in my supply chain are...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 1.93, p = 0.38$	No
<b>Efficiency/Lean improvement processes in my business are...</b>	<b><math>\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 7.59, p = 0.02</math></b>	<b>Yes</b>
Optimising energy/utilities in my business is...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 1.75, p = 0.417$	No
Minimising carbon emission in my business is...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 0.408, p = 0.816$	No
Embedding 'environmentally protective' processes into my business is...	$\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 3.18, p = 0.204$	No

Table 4.7 Entrepreneurial leader importance of embedding sustainability practices into SME

Apart from the efficiency/lean improvements test, overall, the research suggests that there was no association between the size of business and the entrepreneurial

leaders' intention to embed sustainability processes and procedures in their business. In all five statement intentions rated by the SME entrepreneurial leader respondents, a minimum of 49% of them intended to embed environmental practices in their business

Embedding sustainability from a sectoral perspective was conducted in the Qualtrics crosstabs analysis function and 91% of entrepreneurial leaders from the creative industries selected 'embedding environmentally protective processes into my business' as important and extremely important. Using the same measures for creative industries the sectors in order of results were IT and Technologies at 58%, Health Care, Consumer services and Construction (53%), professional services at 37% and manufacturing (32%). Chart 4.42 below presents this diagrammatically.

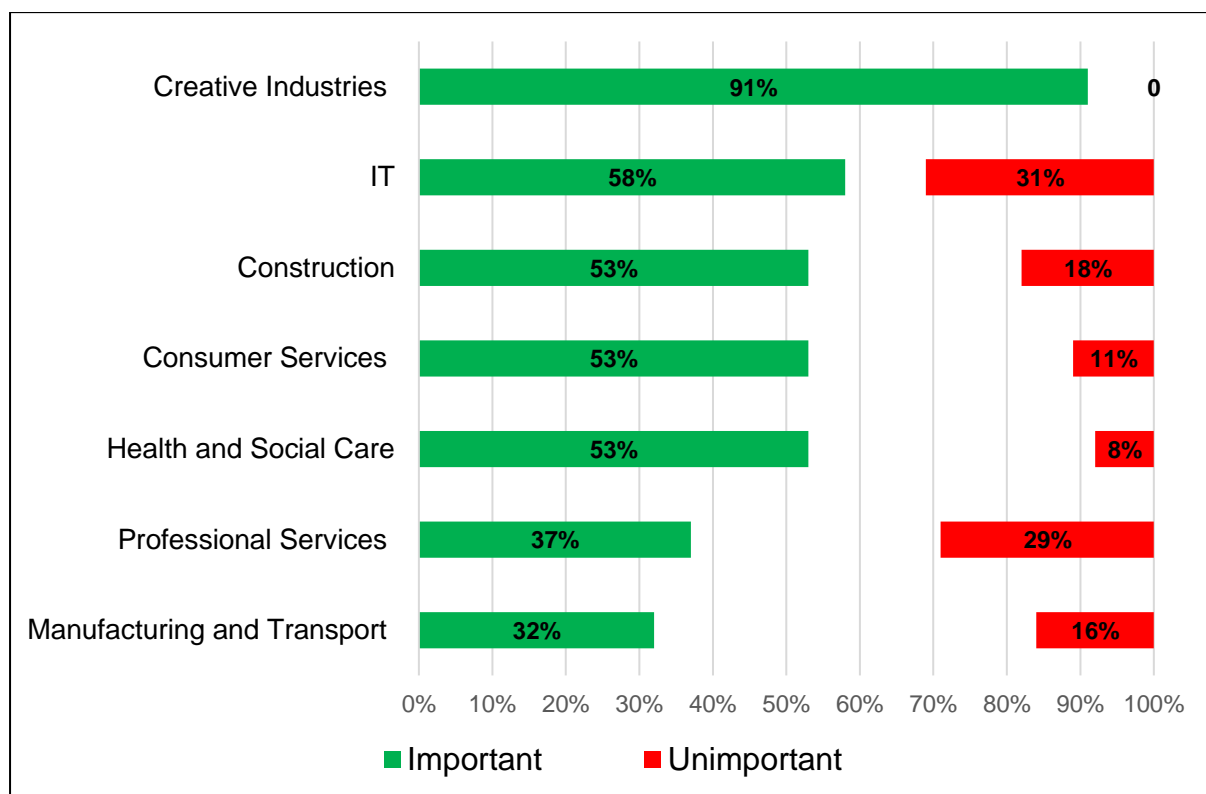


Chart 4.41 Sectoral response to importance of embedding environmental practices into the business by sector

Whilst these results are interesting and may merit further work, the focus of this research is on entrepreneurial leaders' intentions and not on a sectoral basis. Therefore, deeper research into sectoral attitudes to embedding environmental practices would be a recommendation for further research beyond this thesis.

#### 4.7.5 Entrepreneurial leaders' measurement of non-financial (social) data

Entrepreneurial leaders were questioned about the information that they gather to measure the performance of certain business activities to inform decision making. These measures are for non-financial data collection. The respondents were able to select yes, no or not applicable. Chart 4.43 below displays the frequency data collected from the respondents.

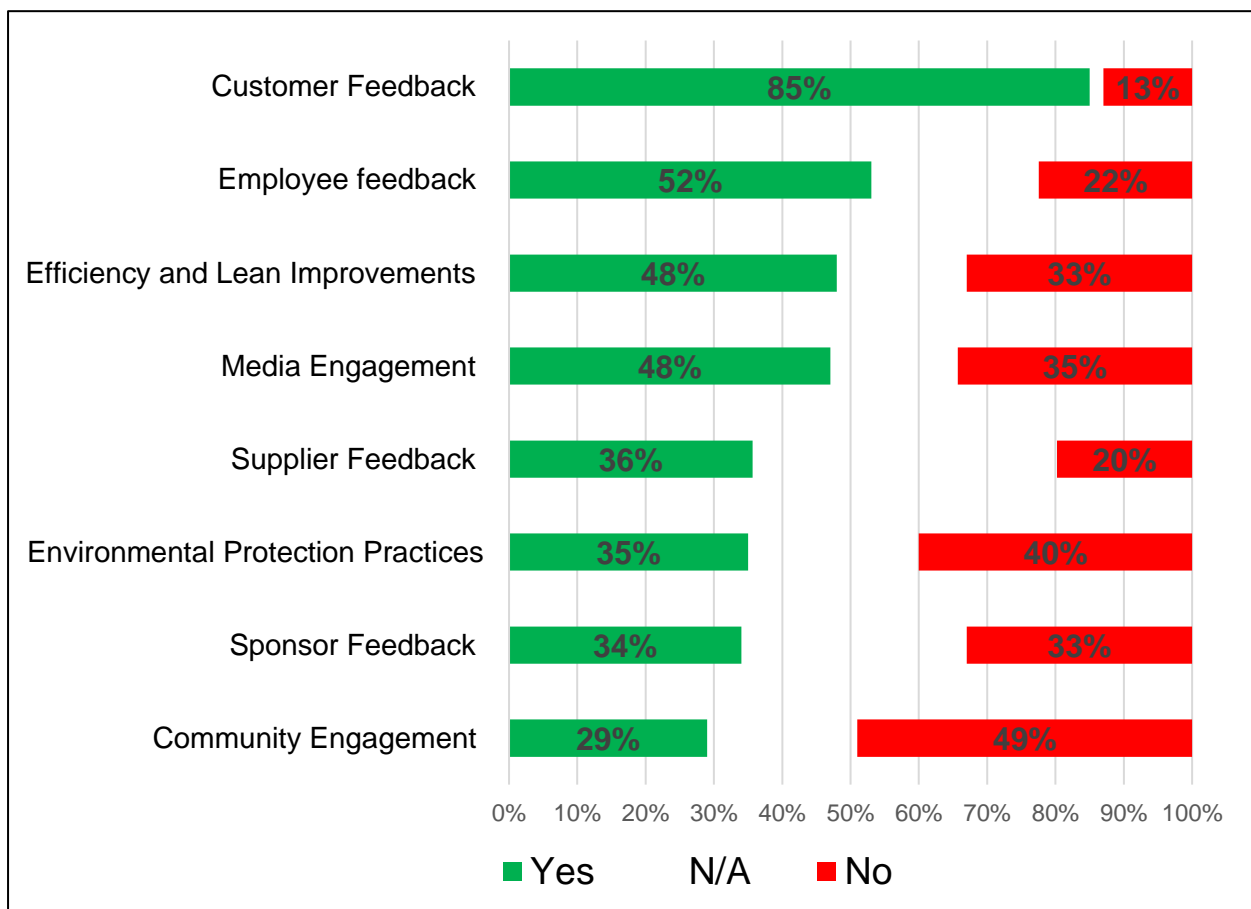


Chart 4.42 Frequency of non-financial data collection to measure performance

When asked about gathering data for business performance measurement purposes, 85% of entrepreneurial leaders responded that they collected customer feedback. Regarding community engagement as a success measure 49% said they did not collect this data. Arguably, if 29% SME entrepreneurial leaders measure community engagement, then over 71% of SMEs do not see the value in collecting this data, do

not know how to collect the data, or do not collect such at all. The reason for this could be that entrepreneurial leaders may misunderstand the potential value of non-financial data as a contribution to SME growth. This may be because it is more difficult to measure accurately or more intangible, and customer feedback would be more straightforward.

The importance of collecting data to inform decisions was tested between the different SME sizes. Using Chi Square test for independence. Results are illustrated in Table 4.9. SME Group 1 is zero employees; SME Group 2 is 1-9 employees and SME Group 3 is 10+ employees.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Chi Squared Test (<math>\chi^2</math>)</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
SME Groups vs Customer Feedback	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 16.026$ , $p = 0.003$ , Phi = 0.280.	Yes	Group 2 (1-9) employees stated no more than Group 3 (10+) employees. Group 3 SMEs gathered customer feedback.
SME Groups vs Employee Feedback	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 129.07$ , $p = 0.001$ , Phi = 0.795.	Yes	Group 2 (1-9) employees stated no more than Group 3 (10+) employees. Group 3 SMEs gathered employee feedback
SME Groups vs Community Engagement	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 22.028$ , $p = 0.001$ , Phi = 0.329.	Yes	Group 2 (1-9) employees stated no more than Group 3 (10+) employees. Group 3 SMEs gathered community engagement feedback.
SME Groups vs Supplier Feedback	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 9.345$ , $p = 0.053$ , Phi = 0.214.	No	There was no significant association on the size of SME and gathering supplier feedback.
SME Groups vs Sponsor/Stakeholder Feedback	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 36.83$ , $p = 0.001$ , Phi = 0.425.	Yes	Not relevant: Group 1 (zero employees) stated 'not applicable' more than the other two groups.

SME Groups vs Environmental protection practices	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 26.77$ , $p = 0.001$ , $\Phi = 0.362$ .	Yes	Group 2 (1-9) employees stated no more than Group 3 (10+) employees. Group 3 SMEs implemented more environmental protection practices.
SME Groups vs Media Engagement	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 8.951$ , $p = 0.062$ , $\Phi = 0.209$ .	No	Not relevant: Group 1 (zero employees) stated 'not applicable' more than the other two groups.
SME Groups vs Efficiency / Lean improvements	$\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 21.95$ , $p = 0.001$ , $\Phi = 0.328$ .	Yes	Not relevant: Group 1 (zero employees) stated 'not applicable' more than the other two groups. There was no association in relation to size of business.

Table 4.8 Statistical Chi Square test for size of SME v business performance data collection

The data shows that there is a difference in intentions of SME entrepreneurial leaders with regards to business size. It appears that group 2 (1-9) employees stated 'no' more than group 3 in relation to collecting customer feedback, employee feedback, community engagement and environmental protective practices. There was no correlation amongst the three groups regarding supplier feedback. Stakeholder, media engagement and efficiency/lean improvement data collection for SME growth measurement appeared less relevant to group 1 but more relevant to group 2 and 3.

To summarise, it is apparent that the larger the SME the more likely it was to gather non-financial data to inform decision making.



## 4.8 Entrepreneurial leaders enabling social growth through employees

### 4.8.1 Introduction

Entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs with employees were asked a further set of Likert questions to explore their intentions to demonstrate social growth through the relationship they had with their employees. Chart 4.44 below shows a summary of the results.

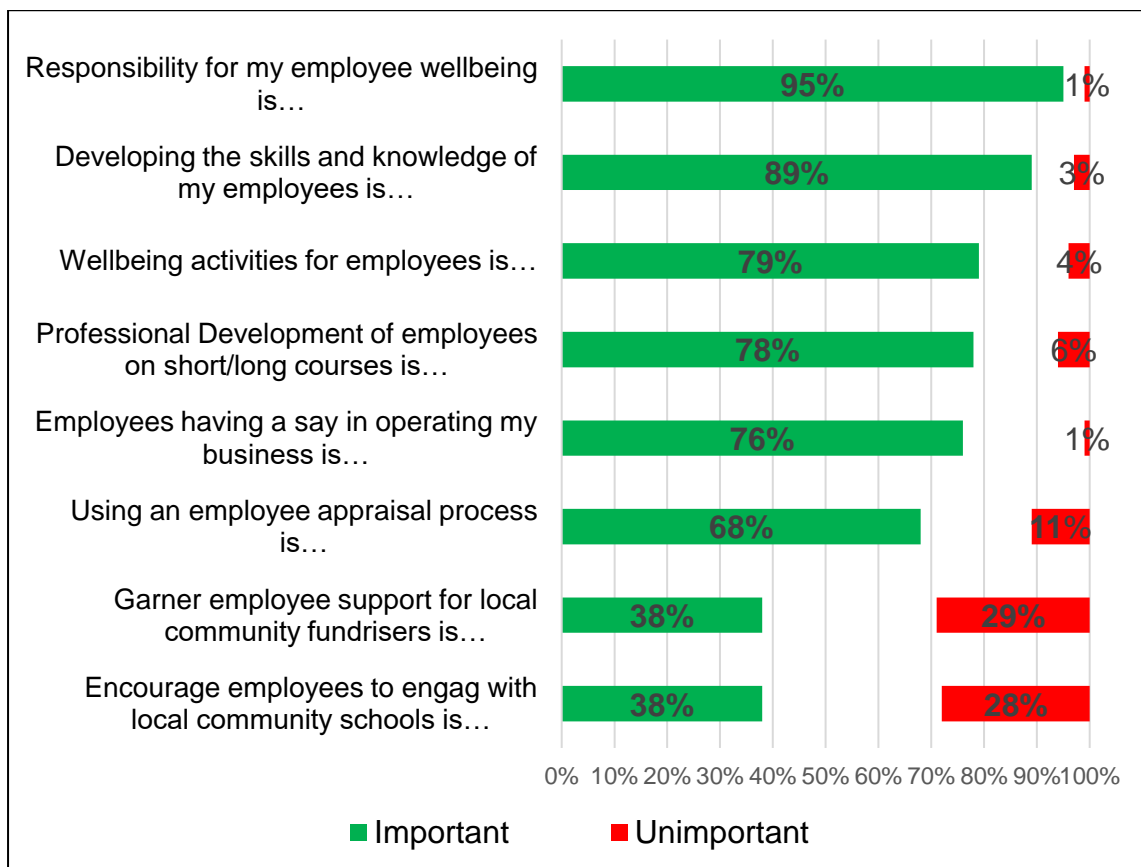


Chart 4.43 Entrepreneurial leaders and social growth through employees

### 4.8.2 Employee wellbeing and enabling social SME growth

Furthermore, Chart 4.45 shows that 95% of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs thought it was important to take responsibility for employee wellbeing.



Chart 4.44 Responsibility for my employee wellbeing in SMEs over the next three years.

The Chart 4.46 below shows the importance for entrepreneurial leaders on considering the relevance of wellbeing activities for their employees over the next three years. Combining both extremely important and important presents 79% of entrepreneurial leaders who believed employee wellbeing activities were important to SME growth over the next three years.

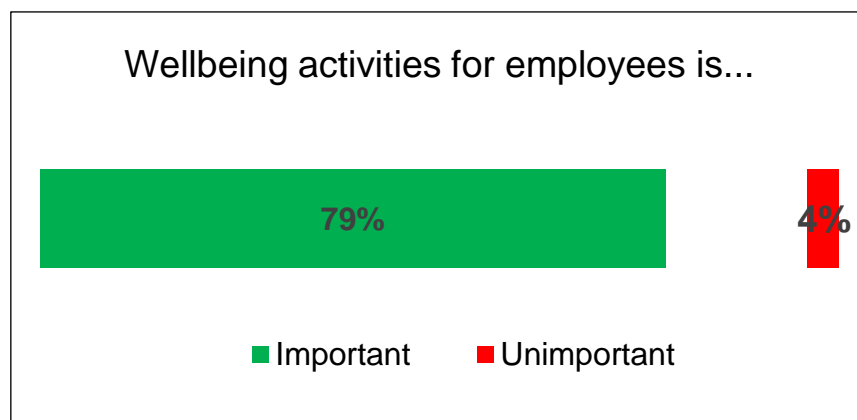


Chart 4.45 Importance of wellbeing activities for employees in SMEs over the next 3 years.

Thus, entrepreneurial leaders seemingly understand the importance of their employee wellbeing for SME growth. Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis Test showed no significance with SME size and employee wellbeing suggesting the importance of this across all SME size groups and associated entrepreneurial leaders.

#### 4.8.3 Employee development and enabling social SME growth

Chart 4.47 below shows that developing the skills and knowledge of employees was the second highest activity that entrepreneurial leaders engaged in with regard to social growth with 89% indicating it was important.

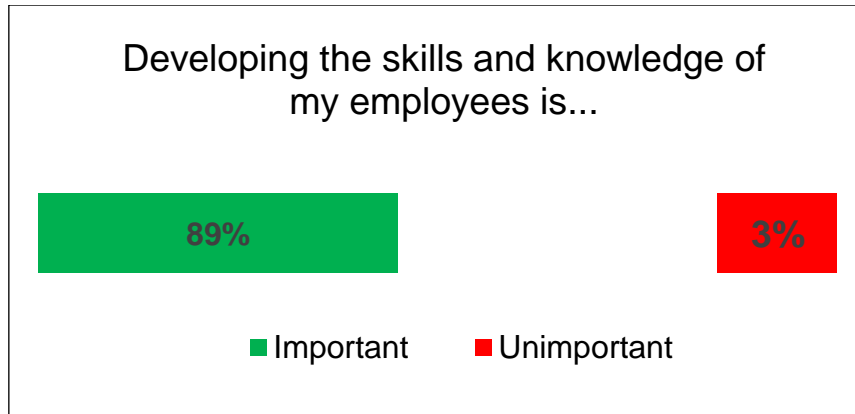


Chart 4.46 Importance to entrepreneurial leaders of developing the skills and knowledge of SME employees over next three years

Similarly, the Chart 4.48 below shows that regarding professional development for long/short-term courses 78% of entrepreneurial leaders ranked this as important. Whilst both appear to be important, the difference suggests that employee skills development may be seen as a priority over professional development on courses for entrepreneurial leaders leading SME employees.

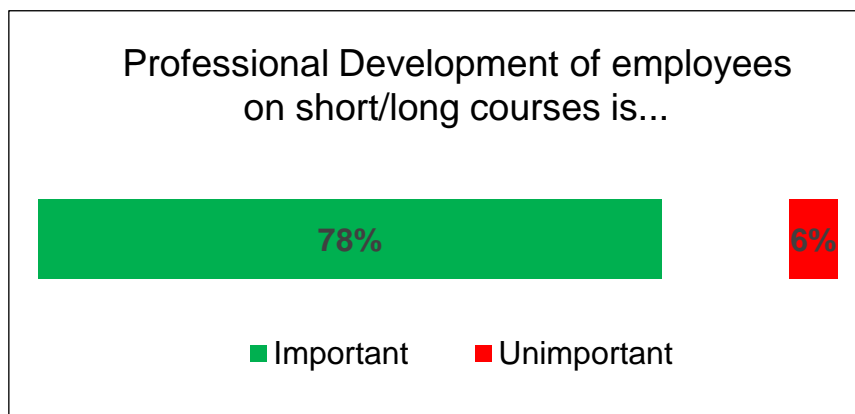


Chart 4.47 Importance of professional development of employees on long/short courses

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test suggest there was no association between the size of business and the entrepreneurial leaders' intention to secure social growth through their employees. This signals that across all SME sizes the importance of socially growing your business through employees will more likely be a consideration over the next 3 years for entrepreneurial leaders. It may also reflect the intentions of leaders to continue to strengthen and in many cases, grow their business in the future, with social growth playing an increasing part in that regard. Furthermore, adapting to the remaining impact of Covid19 and Brexit could also play a part in the entrepreneurial leaders' intention to secure stability and confidence in their employees wellbeing and personal growth.

#### 4.8.4 Employee voice and enabling social SME growth

Chart 4.49 below presents where entrepreneurial leaders with employees were questioned on the importance of the employee voice in working towards SME growth over the next three years.

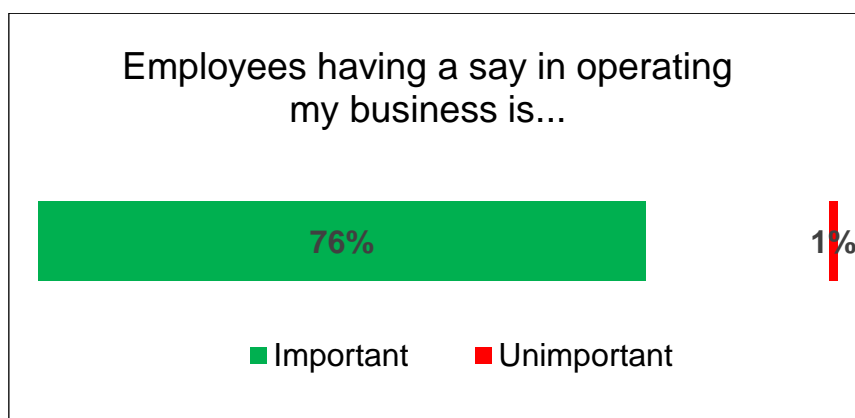


Chart 4.48 Importance of employees having a say in operating my SME over next 3 years

This shows that 76% of entrepreneurial leaders selected employee voice as important or extremely important. The findings suggest entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs showing

'softer' leadership skills, beyond profit, listening to their employee voice to raise relational capital and trust and achieve more social SME growth over the next three years.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted to examine the associations between the 3 sizes of business group and showed no significant association in business size and employees having a say in the business. This suggests intention to listen to the employee voice regardless of the size of the SME.

#### 4.8.5 Employee appraisal and enabling social SME growth

Entrepreneurial leaders with employees were questioned on their use of an employee appraisal process by way of investing in their employees and to rate the importance of this process for their SME growth over the next three years. Chart 4.50 below indicates 68% of entrepreneurial leaders selected the option important or extremely important and 11% said it was unimportant.

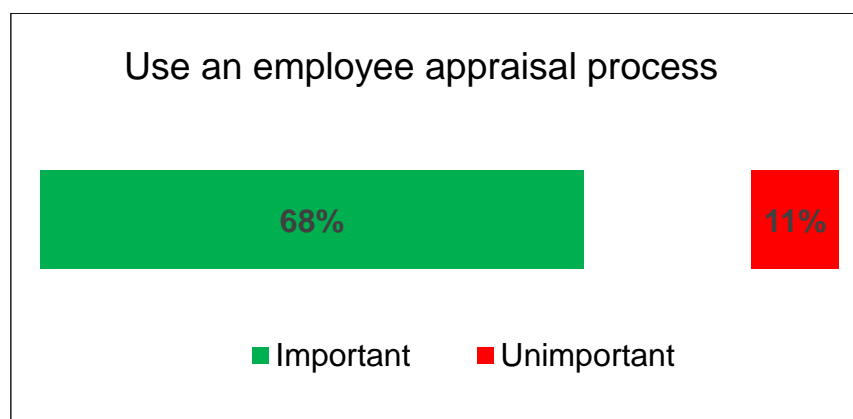


Chart 4.49 Importance of employee appraisal process in SMEs

The findings show a positive intention to appraise and invest in employees to stimulate social growth over the next three years.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted in SPSS v25 to examine the associations between the 3 sizes of business group (Gp1=self Employed n=44, Grp 2 = 1-9 employees n=96, Grp 3 =10+ employees n=64) and tested against the following statement about how the entrepreneurial leader rated the importance of employee appraisal by way of employee engagement. Table 4.10 below illustrates the results.

Likert Question	Kruskal-Wallis	Significance
Use an employee appraisal process...	$\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 15.69, p = 0.001$	Yes

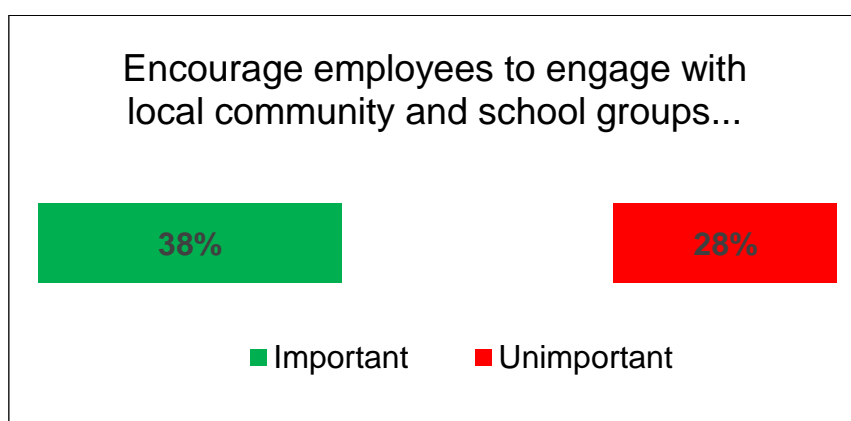
Table 4.9 Kruskal-Wallis test employee appraisal process v SME size

The tests showed that there was a significance between the business size and the use of an employee appraisal process. The results showed  $\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 15.69, P = 0.001$  meaning there was a significant association between the sizes of business and their importance of using an employee appraisal process. Group 2 (1-9 employees) and Group 3 were significantly different in their use of an employee appraisal process. Group 3 found this more important than group 2 with a median of extremely important, compared to group 2 whose median was 4 showing their perception of this activity as important. Therefore, employee appraisals are more important for larger SMEs and growth over the next three years.

#### 4.8.6 Community activities enabling social SME growth

The data for these charts (n=160) was based on 78% of entrepreneurial leaders who had employees.

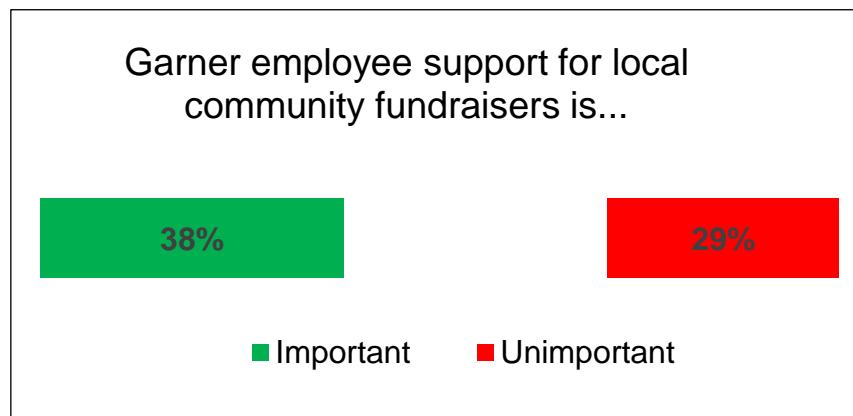
Chart 4.51 below shows the percentage of SME entrepreneurial leaders who rated the importance of encouraging employees to engage with the local community and school groups.



#### Chart 4.50 Importance of encouraging employees to engage with local community and school groups

The data shows that only 38% of entrepreneurial leaders found this important or extremely important, while 28% felt it was not important.

Furthermore, Chart 4.52 below presents the entrepreneurial leaders' consideration of the importance of engagement in considering community fundraisers.



#### Chart 4.51 Importance of garnering employee support to engage in local community fundraisers

Garnering employee support in community fundraisers seems to be something that employers did not feel was important, relatively speaking, for their SME social growth intentions with 38% indicating this was important. Indeed, there were 29% of entrepreneurial leaders considered this to be unimportant. Nevertheless, over one third of entrepreneurial leaders do consider these socially responsible activities to be important and signals a positive change for the future in this regard. A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted and showed no significance with SME size and engaging employees in community activities.

In summary it appears that all groups of SME size value the importance of their employees regarding their SME growth in relation to wellbeing, appraisals, development, and the employee voice. Regarding engaging the employee in community activities seems less important to SME entrepreneurial leaders of all group sizes.

#### 4.8.7 Conclusion

This chapter provides an analysis of the quantitative findings guided by the conceptual framework and following the first phase of the explanatory sequential approach. The analysis contributes to the first research objective and examined the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth particularly in economic and social terms.

The findings presented show strongly that entrepreneurial leaders measure and lead their businesses in economic terms, and this is aligned to the traditional entrepreneurial intentions in an SME to exploit opportunity for profit. However, the results also signal that over the next three years, many of the entrepreneurial leaders do seem to intend to consider the importance of several socially responsible values. Whilst not strong indicators for the importance of SME social growth, there is a definite sense of intentions and decisions pointing toward the sustainability agenda and importance of stakeholder management including employees and the wider community.

The analysis from this chapter will be explored further in phase two of the explanatory sequential approach, where qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 entrepreneurial leaders of Northern Ireland SMEs.



## Chapter 5: Qualitative Research Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

To explore the research question and achieve the research objectives, it was essential to explore entrepreneurial leadership's generation of economic and social growth. As noted in section 1.3, within this research, the broader consideration of these two types of SME growth is referred to as augmented SME growth. The value in researching augmented growth of SMEs is in providing a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial leader and collectively, the potential impact this they have on the socio-economy of Northern Ireland. Using an explanatory sequential approach (ref), the qualitative analysis also builds on the quantitative analysis and explores key aspects of the conceptual framework. The rationale for the qualitative questions for the semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix 9 and Table 3.8 p.150. This chapter outlines the qualitative results from the semi-structured interviews.

The chapter begins with the sample interview group analysis, followed by an analysis of each of the key themes from the findings. Theme A is an analysis of the findings on the entrepreneurial leadership role in SME growth, followed by an analysis of Theme B that explores the entrepreneurial leader's role in enabling SME economic growth, including, and understanding of economic obstacles in this endeavour. The chapter then provides an analysis of the findings for Theme C of the entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth in their SME. Finally, Theme D, provides an analysis of the entrepreneurial leadership role in socially enabling employees within their SME.

### 5.2 Interview group analysis

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with entrepreneurial leaders of Northern Ireland SMEs. This included 12 males and 8 females (n=20). Nine of the participants were entrepreneurial leaders from SMEs with no employees, leaving 6 who employed 1-9 employees and 5 with 10+ employees. Eighty-six entrepreneurial leaders had volunteered to be interviewed by a self-select email mechanism, and from this twenty were contacted for interview and an agreed meeting time arranged. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. All the interviews were recorded on

Microsoft Teams, transcribed, and uploaded to the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. The transcripts were read several times before starting the process of coding, to achieve data immersion.

The results are framed under four broad themes and the structure of the analysis is summarised in Table 5.1 below.

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Nodes</b>	<b>Child Nodes</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Entrepreneurial Leader work lifestyle value, and perceptions	Explore work lifestyle, wellbeing and stakeholder perceptions of the enabling entrepreneurial leader	Personal Lifestyle Values and well being  Entrepreneurial Leader perceptions	Work life balance (Negative) Work life balance (Positive – family commitment/Wellbeing)	<b>A</b>  Entrepreneurial leadership role in SME growth
Entrepreneurial leader and SME economic growth	Explore the entrepreneurial leader enabling economic SME growth.	Growth in economic Terms	Importance of enabling economic growth Obstacles Priority measures Primary intentions  Meaning of SME growth	<b>B</b>  Entrepreneurial leader enabling economic SME growth
Entrepreneurial Leader and SME social growth	Explore the entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth.	Growth in social terms	Importance Social growth Community activities Community relations Greater good (CSR) Measuring social growth	<b>C</b>  Entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth
Entrepreneurial leader and SME social growth	Explore the entrepreneurial leader enabling	Growth in social terms through employees	Employee Volunteering Wellbeing	<b>D</b>

through employees	social growth through employees		Development Appraisal Voice	Entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth through employees
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Table 5.1 Theme analysis guide for Qualitative semi-structured interviews (NVivo)

In terms of the identified four themes, Theme A explored the entrepreneurial leader's work lifestyle, perceptions of and intentions to enable SME growth in economic and social terms. Theme B considered the entrepreneurial leader's role in enabling SME economic growth. Theme C explored the entrepreneurial leader's role in enabling SME social growth. Theme D examined how the entrepreneurial leader enables social growth through their employees.

### 5.3 Theme A: Entrepreneurial leadership role in SME growth

#### 5.3.1 Introduction

Theme A focused on the entrepreneurial leader and their personal values to reveal their purposeful intentions when seeking to enable SME growth economically and socially. The analysis firstly explored the entrepreneurial leaders' perceptions of their lifestyle values, particularly relating to their work life balance, wellbeing and finally stakeholder perceptions through the lens of the SME entrepreneurial leader.

#### 5.3.2 Entrepreneurial leader and lifestyle values

The interviews highlighted some common trends amongst entrepreneurial leaders regarding their work life balance and personal wellbeing. Participants were asked specifically about what was important to them about their work life balance and their views in relation to social enabling and caring leadership. The work life balance

analysis is divided into two main sections, those participants that felt they had a positive work life balance followed by those who believed they did not.

Of the 20 interviewees, the majority said they had a positive work life balance, whereby they could prioritise some time outside of work for non-work activities. The comments below illustrate some of the individual responses:

*“Work life balance is absolutely 100 percent important to me. I am doing what I'm doing now because I want a work life balance” (Interview No.11).*

*“So, part of the reason that I set up my own business was to be able to have a better work life balance...I can now control my time at work” (Interview No.3).*

*“It's really important. Absolutely vital” (Interview No.13).*

From the interview analysis it appears that some entrepreneurial leaders from the sample made a conscious decision to change their work life balance after reflecting on a stressful work period and how this made them feel. The responses below illustrate where entrepreneurial leaders had made a purposeful change in their thinking and consequently their behaviour regarding achieving a work life balance:

*“I don't bring work home with me anymore” (Interview No. 12).*

*“What's important is your health. I had a health scare three years ago where I had a heart episode... So that was a wakeup call” (Interview No.18)*

*“I have rules around stopping work at 5.00pm though it's hard to close at five o'clock. Only exceptionally would I meet clients in the evening” (Interview No.3).*

It was apparent that many entrepreneurial leaders had deep family values that extend into their work life balance. Several SME entrepreneurial leaders mentioned the importance of their family life:

*“I spend a lot of time with the family. We go out as a family, we socialise as a family, and that's extremely important to me” (Interview No.10).*

*“My personal objective is spending more time with the family at this stage” (Interview No.1).*

*“So now I am dedicated to my work life balance and that means more time with my family” (Interview No.11).*

*“The nature of the way I work, is I tailor my business around the needs of my family” (Interview No.5)*

Alternatively, there were also a significant number of more negative responses to work life balance from interviewed entrepreneurial leaders who struggled to maintain a positive work life balance and protect their wellbeing and practice self-care. Lack of time and stress in the workplace may also have an influence on the time available to enable social growth activities:

*“My work life balance is absolutely vital, but I don’t manage it well” (Interview No.10).*

*“My job is to look after the kids and run my business too. When you take care of the kids and do work at the same time, it just doesn’t work, and I just feel like I’m doing everything badly” (Interview No.1).*

*“So, switching off is extremely difficult, especially if your name is above the door” (Interview No.10).*

*“I’m awful at managing my work life balance... I just knock out the hours and I think when it’s your own business you just must do it. I would answer emails at eleven half eleven tonight and over the weekend” (Interview No.12).*

*“In dark times and days when we have difficult clients or bad debt no-matter how hard I try, I take the work home. And the duvet demons hit you at three o’clock in the morning and you wake up and ask yourself, why am I doing this?” (Interview No.11).*

These comments indicate that entrepreneurial leaders struggle with maintaining their work life balance and therefore their wellbeing. It also indicates that whilst some of the entrepreneurial leaders value their work life balance, others have not reached a 'tipping point' in their business where their work life balance suffers until they reach 'economic safety'. Economic safety is a term developed for this research to illustrate where the SME entrepreneurial leader is financially secure.

### 5.3.3 Entrepreneurial leader and wellbeing

A further aspect influencing work life balance was the importance of fitness and wellbeing to entrepreneurial leaders of Northern Ireland SMEs. Multiple references to the importance of fitness and wellbeing activities were made during the interviews, as highlighted below:

*"My own wellbeing is so closely tied in with exercise" (Interview No.1).*

*"If I can I build in some form of exercise two or three times a week, I find my creative thought is multiplied by 10" (Interview No.1).*

*"With regards to my relaxation and wellbeing I like walking, swimming, going to the gym and drinking wine!" (Interview No.12)*

*"My big thing is fishing; I love going fishing" (Interview No.17).*

*"My hopes for the future of my business are that I can take more time off for myself" (Interview No.15).*

*"The key thing for me is that I maintain my business growth year on year and sustain my lifestyle and support kids at university" (Interview No.5).*

Analysing these findings indicates a growing importance of fitness and wellbeing as key decisions for entrepreneurial leaders. The findings suggest that it may be something that they are more cognisant of whether they want to grow or merely

sustain their SME growth year on year. Moreover, in exploring the role of the entrepreneurial leader in the generation of augmented SME growth, the findings identified that rising values in wellbeing, aligned to the emerging importance of human centricity in the 5<sup>th</sup> Industrial revolution was illuminating changing perceptions in this arena.

#### 5.3.4 Entrepreneurial leader and stakeholder perceptions

In considering how entrepreneurial leaders perceive themselves through the lens of stakeholders, the interview question was, 'As the leader of the business how would you like to be perceived by others external to your business?' These descriptions of the leader themselves may help indicate to what extent perception of others is important to their business growth in social terms (Radulovich et al., 2018). There were a significant number of responses and a selection of these are included below:

*"A solid citizen" (Interview No.1), "Driven, energetic and creative" (Interview No.10), "Warm, authentic, friendly, open" (Interview No.12), "caring and honest" (Interview No. 13), "knowledgeable and trusting" (Interview No.14), "Hardworking" (Interview No.18); "Professional" (Interview, No.20), "Helpful, it is not all about the money" (Interview No.6), "Safe pair of hands" (Interview, No.7), "Can trust me to listen" (Interview No.19).*

Some entrepreneurial leaders indicated how their leadership may be perceived by staff:

*"I wouldn't ask the guys to do anything I would not do myself" (Interview No.15).*

*"I treat everyone the same including my staff" (Interview No.16).*

*"I hope staff would not see me as cold, hard nosed, don't care about people and that I am only interested in myself" (Interview No.8).*

It was notable where some participants used unusual language to describe how they would like to be considered by stakeholders. For example,

*“Not just a one trick pony” (Interview No.10).*

*“I’m not going to make promises I can’t keep” (Interview No.1).*

*“I wouldn’t want to be seen as cold and stand-off-ish or difficult to approach” (Interview No.12).*

*“I think some people think I am a little unhinged...I am quite ballsy and have strong opinions” (Interview No.15).*

In summary, the interviews suggest that many entrepreneurial leaders had strong views around upholding their work-life balance, lifestyle and wellbeing when leading and growing their SME. The respondent comments on ‘perception of me by stakeholders’ suggests opinions of others were important to entrepreneurial leaders when leading and growing their SME.

#### 5.4 Theme B: The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth in NI SMEs

##### 5.4.1 Introduction

Theme B focused on the entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. The analysis explored the importance for entrepreneurial leaders to enable economic growth, considering obstacles, measures, primary intentions and the meaning of SME growth.

##### 5.4.2 Importance of enabling economic SME growth

To explore commercial (economic) intentions and behaviours of entrepreneurial leaders, the interviewer asked participants, “Is it important to grow your business financially year on year?” This question linked to the entrepreneurial leader’s goal of driving economic/commercial growth by optimising opportunity. There were 34 references to the importance of financial growth over the 20 interviews. The insights below raise awareness on the economical commercial intentions of the sample of NI SME entrepreneurial leaders and highlight the importance of economic growth:



*“Financial Growth is part and parcel of what we are trying to do” (Interview No. 13).*

*“Financial profit is absolutely vital...if you consider the number of people, we employ...if you are sitting still you are going backwards...financials are always important” (Interview No.16).*

*“Financial profit it so important as it allows me to reinvest back into the business and afford a certain lifestyle” (Interview No.5).*

*“I like to see my business grow financially year on year because that is how I measure improvement” (Interview No.3).*

*“Let’s be brutally honest, it is hard enough to make money, it’s a lot harder if you are not making money...it is not necessarily financial, it is about profit” (Interview No.15).*

*“Absolutely, if I said otherwise, I would be stupid...only a fool would say it is not important to grow your business financially” (Interview No.4).*

*“I think we all want to make money in our business...constantly striving to make it more profitable” (Interview No. 6).*

*“I’ll always still come back to what’s the turnover and what was the profit and are you still increasing your sales and increasing your profit?” (Interview No.9).*

Interestingly, interviewees were very keen to point out that financial growth was balanced against other aspects, as indicated:

*“Yeah...financial growth is important...but not at any cost” (Interview No.7).*

*“I actually want to make less money, do less hours and spend more time with my family enjoying the money I make” (Interview No.10).*

*“Financial goals are important metrics for my business...but a business is much more than pounds and pence” (Interview No.8).*

#### 5.4.3 Obstacles to economic SME growth

This analysis looked at the general responses to challenges to SME growth and then focused on the impact of Covid19 and Brexit on SME growth from the entrepreneurial leaders' perspective.

The entrepreneurial leaders were asked firstly about obstacles to SME growth with the question 'what could challenge your business in the next 3 years?' Selected responses are detailed below:

*“A continued reliance on me” (Interview No.1).*

*“The size of the Northern Ireland market, it is tiny compared to the global market” (Interview No.12).*

*“I think recruitment will struggle in hospitality” (Interview No.15).*

*“Staffing is a challenge for my business” (Interview No. 2).*

*“The political status in Northern Ireland... we do not have a green champion here” (Interview No.20).*

*“I think it is a challenge for all entrepreneurs to find the time and pay for their own upskilling or cognitive development” (Interview No. 6).*

*“I am limited by the number of hours in the week and the income I can generate (Interview No.5).*

*“Maintaining my own enthusiasm and resilience...when you are juggling all the balls in the air” (Interview No.7).*

This section as seen from above comments, contained general responses, as the nature of the question facilitated the entrepreneurial leader to answer from their own personal context. Therefore, analysis is diverse and difficult to categorise. However, it does show the general obstacles to growth challenging entrepreneurial leaders in the current economic climate.

The next section of responses referred more specifically to Covid19 and Brexit obstacles.

Given the Covid19 pandemic it was interesting to note that there were numerous NVivo references made to this during the interviews. Out of these references the majority referred to the challenges of Covid19, yet almost two thirds to the opportunities that entrepreneurial leaders had embraced for their business growth. This indicates there were both positive and negative aspects to entrepreneurial leaders' thinking regarding the impact of Covid19 on the growth of NI SMEs.

More negative responses to Covid19 that appeared to inhibit the entrepreneurial leaders' decisions around SME growth are illustrated below:

*"I suppose in the last year because of Covid our books dropped by probably somewhere between 80 and 90 percent" (Interview No.12).*

*"Mostly Covid is my big challenge...I don't understand why the price of goods are going up" (Interview No.6).*

*"Covid is causing a lot of fear around redundancy and that is having an impact on staff's mental health and doing huge hours just to protect their job and livelihood" (Interview No.14).*

*"Covid is going to cause a huge challenge for us regarding recruitment" (Interview No.16).*

*"That wild journey through the pandemic, it was quite depressing as I had to close my business during it...I don't think I could do another lockdown...I really couldn't" (Interview No.17).*

*"Covid has been the biggest challenge to me" (Interview No.4)*

In contrast, more positive participant responses to Covid19 as an enabler to SME growth are illustrated below:

*"Frankly Covid, Brexit, any of those challenges did really affect us in a strange way, however their impact has been a net positive (Interview No.11).*

*“Covid and Lockdown have a made me recognise the benefits of taking a little more care of myself and forcing me to get a bit more of a balance” (Interview No.13).*

*“So, the opportunity that Covid brought to my business is that it created a virtual world and let me to realise the world is a small place and I can generate referrals much easier through webinars” (Interview No.14).*

*“Actually, Covid was an opportunity... so we completely changed our business model, and it is working for us” (Interview No.15).*

*“Covid meant we re-invented our business and will never go back” (Interview No.16).*

*“Covid actually created opportunities for me that I captured very quickly” (Interview No.3).*

*“Covid probably speeded up something that was going to happen anyway” (Interview No.6).*

Out of the 20 interviews, there were many positive references to Brexit when it came to SMEs along with two negative references. This sample of entrepreneurial leaders certainly seemed to see Brexit as more of an opportunity rather than the contrary, or they may have been adopting an optimistic outlook. Firstly, looking at the more negative comments:

*“Brexit has caused us to lose the best workers in hospitality” (Interview No.18).*

*“Brexit has given us extra costs for custom declarations” (Interview No.6).*

The more positive comments on Brexit are shown below:

*“I’m sick and tired of people complaining about Brexit...if a business is not doing well, do something else or adapt your business, that is what I did” (Interview No.10).*

*“I know the messaging out there that Brexit is negative, but I actually think there is a real position of opportunity for Northern Ireland SMEs in the Brexit context” (Interview No.11).*

*“Brexit has not impacted us massively, in fact it has created opportunity, though some of our customers are nervous about the border situation” (Interview No.12).*

*“Brexit actually has been good for my business and created opportunity” (Interview No.3).*

This possibly illustrates the entrepreneurial leaders’ ‘will’ to grasp opportunity, as suggested above, notwithstanding a challenging external environment.

#### 5.4.4 Job creation and priority measures for economic SME growth

Job creation and priority measures relate to the intention of the entrepreneurial leader to create jobs to start a business in addition to other measures of SME growth.

*“I want to grow though innovating new products and employ people and give local people job security” (Interview No.13).*

*“My hope for my business is that I continue to make a difference for individuals and people’s lives” (Interview No.14).*

*“Increasing turnover and employing more people” (Interview No.9).*

*“Growth is growing, the team, its training people upskilling, the staff that we have growing a bit of a kind community within the team” (Interview No.13).*

*“Growth for me is developing my teams into leaders” (Interview No.6)*

The entrepreneurial leader comments above sign post the importance of SME growth and the desire to create jobs and employ more staff to sustain the growth of the business.

Participants were asked about their priority measures for economic SME growth and what business growth meant for them:

*“Reaching the sales forecast in our business plan...a returning client...that is growth for me” (Interview No.7).*

*“Sanity is to increase in profit. Business growth is also where you save money. So, it's not just about increasing sales” (Interview No.15).*

*“I have to make money financially in my business so that I can grow it and reinvest my profits to make it better and grow further” (Interview No.18).*

*“Business growth for me would be a percentage increase in sales” (Interview No.5).*

*“Primarily we try to grow the business through profit” (Interview No.8).*

Entrepreneurial leaders' responses advocate the importance of economic growth, (expressed through profit/sales) as a measure of sustaining an SMEs growth trajectory.

#### 5.4.5 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth

Participants were asked what their ambition for business growth was over the next three years. The following indicates, the range of responses received:

*“...5-10% growth year on year” (Interview No.3).*

*“...if I can manage to scale it and continue to make money” (Interview No.4).*

*“...grow organically without stress” (Interview No.7).*

*“...would consider franchising” (Interview No.8).*

*“I would like to exit in 5 years with a management buyout” (Interview No.12).*

The comments would clearly suggest, that many SME entrepreneurial leaders interviewed were ambitious to grow their business economically over the next three years in several ways.

#### 5.4.6 The meaning of SME growth to entrepreneurial leaders

The analysis on the challenges, opportunities, and ambitions of entrepreneurial leaders of NI SMEs, suggests economic growth as a priority. However, to explore further the potential importance of more socially responsible decision making of entrepreneurial leaders, a question on the meaning of business growth was posed. The responses below indicate the importance of economic growth to some of the entrepreneurial leader participants:

*“It’s about putting food on the table and providing my family with choices” (Interview No.1).*

*“More shoes and handbags are what business growth means” (Interview No.12).*

*“Making sure investors are happy and keeping our promise to them”*

Whilst the meaning of business growth provided responses that referred primarily to economic growth, it was notable that for some respondents, business growth was not necessarily a measurable priority.

*“I am not looking to grow my business; I do not set out to grow my business...what it means to me is bringing in enough money that it allows me to live for today” (Interview No.10).*

*“I have reached capacity so it would put me under more pressure to grow anymore...the biggest challenge to me would be growing my business to a size I could not cope, and it is just finding that balance. I do not want to employ people” (Interview No.3).*

*“So, I don’t want to grow my business...I just want to sustain my business growth” (Interview No.4).*

*“Financial goals are important metrics for my business...but a business is much more than pounds and pence” (Interview No.8).*

*“Growth for me is protecting our employees’ mental health...their job is more than just a pay cheque” (Interview No.16).*

It was interesting to note that many of the interview participants commented on a broader sense of business growth beyond profit and sales and advocated the

importance of social growth beyond measurable indicators, in various forms, as illustrated by the responses below.

*“Softer values in business growth are important to me, it is not all about the money. So, we bring both of those together” (Interview No.1).*

*“For me, life is about enjoying what you have now because your health is your wealth...the world that we live in today, is totally broken, it's all about money, money, money” (Interview No.10).*

*“Business growth to me feels to be a bit more community focussed” (Interview No.11).*

*“I think this collective approach has become much more important to me than business growth” (Interview No. 11).*

*“Business growth to me is about growing your network, offering opportunities to people working in the business and nurturing them organically...it's not all about the money, it is also a commitment to the greater good” (Interview No.18).*

*“I always had a picture in my head of what successful business looks like...it was never about profit...it is not profit or people...it is profit and people” (Interview No.8).*

In summary, Theme B signals that whilst economic growth was the primary SME growth ambition, among the SME entrepreneurial leaders there was also an indication that some other measures relating to social growth beyond that of profit or economic gain were becoming increasingly important from a community/employee perspective.

## 5.5 Theme C: The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth in NI SMEs

### 5.5.1 Introduction

There has been recent research undertaken into the role of leadership to create positive social and economic change within local communities (Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022; Jones and Crompton, 2009). However, this thesis also suggests that the SME



entrepreneurial leader may exhibit capabilities beyond profit maximisation whereby a conscious social ethos is embedded in their daily business activities. Leavy (2012) alludes to the nuanced entrepreneurial leader who generates social and economic value in a commercial business, successfully achieving both goals concurrently.

### 5.5.2 Importance of social SME growth

The interviewed respondents were asked about the non-commercial activities that occurred in their NI SME and specifically, ‘what decisions do you make to engage in non-commercial activities within your business, for example volunteering or supporting community charities?’ Over half of the respondents referred to non-commercial activities that entrepreneurial leaders believed contributed to the greater good (social growth and impact) within their communities. The interviewee comments below offer an insight into the social ethos emanating from commercial entrepreneurial leaders of NI SMEs:

*“...working in the non-commercial side of things, has made me a better business owner. It's made me a better leader, more empathetic and maybe more understanding” (Interview No.12).*

*“It was always my vision from day one...if you own a business, you are privileged and part of that...is to give back and to the wider community as a whole and make that part of the decisions that you make” (Interview No.15).*

*“I suppose it is not all about making money there are other important things to help the community like the charity fundraisers we do” (Interview No.18).*

*“Being appreciated by your community means you are more likely to win business. When your kids go to the local school and their parents work for you too, the business is all wrapped up in the community. The community is the heartbeat of our village, and our business is too” (Interview No.2).*

*“Non-commercial goals are really, really important to me, it is something I didn't think about before now” (Interview No.20).*

*“It is really important to me, and it has always been in my nature to be giving like that” (Interview No.3).*

*“So, my non-commercial goals are not planned, it is just when opportunities arise for me to give something back to the community” (Interview No.4).*

*“I coach the local boys football team...I find it very rewarding...it is not associated to my business...it is just something within yourself to give” (Interview No.5).*

*“Every month I do pro-bono for groups and the wider community” (Interview No.7).*

*“I would say the community aspect is driven by an appetite from my staff” (Interview No.8).*

*“From when I was young people helped me out pro-bono and now I kind of want to do the same” (Interview No.9).*

The comments suggest that many entrepreneurial leaders do have intentions for the ‘greater good’, beyond the economic growth of their SME. Subsequently they generate both positive social and economic change within their local communities, achieving both goals concurrently.

### 5.5.3 Community activities and enabling social SME growth

Having reviewed the reflections of entrepreneurial leaders on non-commercial activities, the following is a summary of their thoughts, with actual examples of the types of non-commercial activities being implemented in the SME for social growth. The most common non-commercial activity noted in the data was ‘pro-bono mentoring’ from one entrepreneurial leader to another, followed by community and charitable activities for the ‘greater good’. Guest lectures and pro-bono presentations were also a frequent activity, followed by sponsorship of local football and Gaelic teams. Out of the 20 interviews over two thirds of respondents commented on implementing non-commercial activities in SMEs. Some of the examples are noted below:

*“We ran our cafes for a day just before Christmas and give all our proceeds to Marie Curie. So, we raised about eleven thousand pounds for that and to be honest, it's more about giving back and it's not just about money” (Interview No.15).*

*“We do some coffee mornings for Macmillan” (Interview No. 2).*

*“The hero shield project where we designed PPE and a local manufacturing company made the Hero Shield during Covid for the NHS, it was a huge collaborative project with lots of local companies. A lot of companies give their time for free. The blood delivery persons delivered these all-over Northern Ireland for us free” (Interview No.13).*

*“We do get involved with local arts and concerts and we sponsor some flowerbeds in the area” (Interview No.17).*

*“I support Young Enterprise Northern Ireland, like the way that people help out there” (Interview No.9).*

*“I would mentor some students that have just come out of university with an energy degree” (Interview No.20).*

*“Another activity I do that is altruistic is I mentor other new starts business owners in the kraft collective, and I get a real buzz from doing that” (Interview No.4).*

*“We are sponsors of two of the local rugby clubs just because of connections in there. So, Bangor Rugby Club and East Belfast, we sponsor and put some money in and help events there, but not actively enough probably” (Interview No.12).*

*“I also sponsor events in the fishing club, and I used to sponsor the football club as well” (Interview No. 5).*

#### 5.5.4 Community relations and enabling social SME growth

As far back as Bandura (1986, 2001), social cognitive theory establishes that an individual's reciprocal and concurrent interactions can influence change in the form of

overcoming challenge through partnership and interdependencies (Tan and Meyer, 2010). The building of these relational resources can enable the entrepreneurial leader to grow their business in the local economy alongside challenges presented within the wider economy. As Radulovich (2019 p.128) claims

“Entrepreneurial Leadership influences business performance by orchestrating the deployment of intellectual relational assets, which, in turn, results in new reconfigurations of service”.

The relationships that entrepreneurial leaders have with their communities are likely to be less formal, more trusting and combined with personal engagement and mutual intuition, to provide multiple opportunities for reciprocal benefits for enhanced business performance (Radulovich, 2019).

A further question asked participants ‘How do you feel about building reciprocal relationships between your business and the community?’ From the interviews there were many references made to reciprocal relationships and the importance of growing reciprocal relationships either with their community and/or their employees, as illustrated with the following:

*“It builds connections for people to say, look, you've helped me out there, so I am happy to help you out some day too free of charge” (Interview No.10).*

*“I think the community know that we're very open, very honest, but it doesn't mean that we're not shrewd when we need to be. (Interview No.13).*

*“Yes, relationships are really important, a good example is where my landlord would lend me their mechanical Korean digger to do a job in this building...I help him out with his logistics” (Interview No.6).*

In summary the responses from entrepreneurial leaders signalled an inclination towards building reciprocal relations that are not necessarily economically motivated.

### 5.5.5 Socially responsible SME growth.

Having asked the question about engaging in 'non-commercial activities' (Section 5.4.1), many participants may have found this question repetitive, "How important is the greater good to you and your social responsibility activities in the coming years?" There were only two additional participant comments on their commitment to the greater good beyond the first question:

*"I'm a huge fan of the social business concept doing well and doing good. So, I would like to further embed those types of agendas to have a positive social impact alongside the financial growth of the business" (Interview No.1).*

*"My cafes could be the place that people come to if they are lonely, it literally could be the only positive influence in somebody's life that day...so make that a pleasant experience, make it a good one for the sake of building a strong sense of community belonging" (Interview No.15).*

In addition to the positive non-commercial activities that the entrepreneurial leaders initiate, there were also some negative responses to volunteering their pro bono time activities:

*"No, I purposely don't get involved in non-commercial activities like committees because of the stage my family are at and at this point, I don't want to conflict my time skills with family time" (Interview No.1)*

*"I know I should think about ways that we can engage with the community and especially locally, but honestly, we just haven't the resources, it's a time thing. It's not like there is a lack of desire to do it. It's just resource constraints" (Interview No.11).*

*"I do get asked to sit in different boards and do different things and I generally will just say no because I'm busy with these other things" (Interview No.20).*

*"My thoughts always were let us get the thing up and running and self-sustaining and then we'll worry about outreach and do all that other nice stuff..." (Interview No.11).*

*“And it's hard to especially when you're trying to get the business into an even keel to have time to think of those other things” (Interview No.6).*

*“Once I get to the income level mark that I have in my head, I'm happy to do those sorts of things. But until I get there, I'm going to be doing none of those things” (Interview No.9).*

In summary, there is a sense from the respondents that being socially responsible had a ‘tipping point’ where once the SME was flourishing economically, only then would entrepreneurial leaders consider more socially responsible intentions. Therefore, this suggests the initial priority of SME entrepreneurial leaders are their economic concerns.

#### 5.5.6 Sustainability and enabling social SME growth

Widyani et al. (2020) found that when ethical behaviour is added to the dimensions of an entrepreneurial leader: risk taking, proactiveness and innovativeness, it can improve business performance in terms of profitability, the creation of social growth and long-term business sustainability. This suggests that social growth in SMEs through environmental protective practices contribute to a ‘green growth agenda’ and is indicative of a socially enabling entrepreneurial leader. In asking the entrepreneurial leaders ‘How do you feel about making your business socially responsible?’ out of the 20 interviews conducted, almost all the entrepreneurial leaders spoke of the perceived importance of sustainability and the green agenda. The comments below show some of the positive participant responses:

*“And I'm a kind of eco warrior guy, we print virtually zero, my next car will be an electric car. We recycle everything. And we support a number of businesses who engage in sustainability processes” (Interview No.1).*

*“It has been in my mind...the environment is a really important thing and there is a growing consciousness that we need to do more to help our grandchildren as folks” (Interview No.12).*

*“Something we're focussing a lot of attention on this year. It's something we've always been mindful of but on a smaller scale...from that perspective, it's*

*something that consumers expect now and it's something that we feel very strongly about" (Interview No.13).*

*"I will not stock any unethical products and I have an ethical wholesaler...the environmental impact is one of our top priorities" (Interview No.15).*

*"Environmental and social responsibility is very much part of our focus, and it's integrated into our business plan. We were the first people to receive an environmental award 20 years ago and have been recognised by the local council and GreenNI for our environmental policy. It is in our psyche, and important when you are a parent and a teacher too" (Interview No.2).*

On the other hand, there were also some relatively more critical views about sustainability and the green agenda:

*"It is not one of my top 2 priorities...I'm buying a new one of the new electric cars, I never bought it for environmental reasons... I bought it for tax reasons" (Interview No.10).*

*"It's not something that forms a big part of our thinking...it doesn't align to supporting high growth tech start-ups" (Interview No.11).*

*"I am paying perhaps three or four times as much for environmentally friendly products for the cafes and thinking I am doing the right thing, then there is a concern that the products have been green washed" (Interview No.15).*

*"No, I am not big into the green agenda...I am terrible for printing out material so that I can really get into it" (Interview No.3).*

*"Government regulation forces us to print out numerous copies to cover ourselves from litigation...so regulation tramples our ability to be socially responsible" (Interview No.8).*

*"There is nothing that we are really doing yet...but when we scale our business it will be business that is socially responsible" (Interview No.9).*

In summary, there was a growing sense of importance among this sample of entrepreneurial leaders that the 'green agenda' was an important consideration in their business growth. In exploring the role of the entrepreneurial leader in generating 'augmented' SME growth, the findings illustrate a shift toward the importance of 'zero

carbon' in line with the Better Business Act, 2021 ([www.betterbusinessact.org](http://www.betterbusinessact.org)). That said it was notable that there were several more negative responses to the 'green agenda'. This suggests it is clearly not yet viewed as a priority at this point for SME growth and could be related to the tipping point of what the author has termed 'economic safety' where the SME entrepreneurial leader is financially secure.

### 5.5.7 Measuring social growth

Commercial SME businesses are the backbone to an economy (Eggers, 2020) and can have a positive social impact on their wider communities (Longworth, 2014). However, measuring the social impact of a commercial business is more difficult for policy makers as they cannot agree on what it is or how to assess it. Having interviewed 20 participants it was clear that whilst many engage in the activity, measuring it in terms of value added or social impact is not something that many entrepreneurial leaders take time to do or see. Evidence of this is indicated in the fact that only one interviewee said they measured the time spent on pro-bono consultancy:

*"Yes, I measure it in time, I keep my timesheets very tight as do a lot of consultants, so half day or full day and I could manage it on my electronic diary"*  
(Interview No.3).

Only one other business measured their social impact and that was attached to environmental reasons in order to win a business award:

*"We measured it to get awards. So, we did that on two different occasions. So not like measuring money, but environmental targets are a type of money because they are valuable if you are trying to measure them for awards"*  
(Interview No.2).

The remaining interviews all said they did not measure social growth. The following shows some examples of the participant responses:

*"No, I don't, I just take and give the time required to fulfil my pro-bono work"*  
(Interview No.12).

*"No, it's not something we measure"* (Interview No.13).



*“No... I've never done that... measure the time I spend doing good” (Interview No.6).*

*“I do not record it anywhere formally...I would need to figure it out at the end of each year” (Interview No.5).*

*“No, I don't... though I think it should be. It's something I always want to do and I enjoy it. I think the government should take into consideration that businesses that are doing well are growing and giving to the community should have an incentive for pro bono guidance and help” (Interview No. 9).*

*“I guess it is a legal requirement to measure your income and profit to pay tax, but it is not illegal to not measure your non-commercial activities. It's not easy to measure non-commercial activities, but it's still very valuable and I guess we should have to measure everything that is valuable” (Interview No.19).*

In summary, most entrepreneurial leaders interviewed did not measure social SME growth nor did there appear to be an awareness of any need to, but they did indicate it was enlightening to consider it. Moreover, the rising use of Environmental and Social Governance (ESGs - EU, 2022) on SME balance sheets suggests a signal toward measuring social value as an indicator of SME growth performance.

## 5.6 Theme D: The entrepreneurial leader enabling SME social growth through employees

### 5.6.1 Introduction

This section references the entrepreneurial leaders who reported that they did enable social growth through their employees and therefore only reflects the responses to 11 interviews, or those entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs who employed others. There were an additional four interview questions presented to these participants with the view that their responses would further explore if they felt they achieved social growth through their employees.

### 5.6.2 Employees engaging in community activities and social SME growth

The first interview question was designed to uncover the entrepreneurial leaders' feelings around engaging employees in non-commercial activities and initiatives. An example would be facilitating volunteering for employees, whether that was time off for individuals or engaging employees collectively in the activity. From the 11 participants there were numerous references to employee engagement in non-commercial activities, a sample of which is below:

*"I feel it is important to give our employees time to do their own extracurricular charitable work" (Interview No.1).*

*"We allow time off to do volunteering work actively encourage our people to do that too" (Interview No.13).*

*"Staff know if they need time off to volunteer, we will accommodate that" (Interview No.16).*

*"I have a very positive view of this because volunteering concerns their self-esteem and their sense of self. My employees want to win for our pub and they also want to win for the community. We want our employees to self-improve for themselves, but we are also raising the skills for the community within which they work" (Interview No. 2).*

In summary, the majority of employing entrepreneurial leaders interviewed facilitated their employees to engage in volunteering or other community-based projects. This suggests that entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs were not averse to supporting these activities that may support employee wellbeing and also contribute to social growth within the community.

### 5.6.3 Employee well-being and enabling SME social growth

The survey for this research indicated that 95% of SME entrepreneurial leaders recognise the importance of employee well-being. However there seemed to be a wide range of interpretation about what employee wellbeing meant in the qualitative interviews. When asked, 'how do you feel about your employee wellbeing?', this produced multiple responses from the 11 entrepreneurial leaders interviewed who have employees, so it is something that they would be more likely to consider now than they did in the past:

*"I feel very responsible for my employee wellbeing" (Interview No.11).*

*"It's just the ultimate importance. If someone is not happy, whether it's at home or in the workplace you're not going to get the best from them and may leave" (Interview No.13).*

*"Prioritising their wellbeing means prioritising their work life balance. It's financially supporting them too...you get back in abundance from staff when you are mindful of their wellbeing" (Interview No.15).*

*"Their well-being is so important to me. The mental health of my staff is vitally important" (Interview No.16).*

*"Employee wellbeing is seriously important. It's massive. In this industry especially because it is quite stressful" (Interview No.17).*

In summary, the comments confirm there was a high level of awareness of the need to consider the wellbeing of employees within the context of SME growth.

#### 5.6.4 Employee development and enabling SME social growth

Employee development is another potential enabler of growth within an SME, whereby value may be generated for the business through employees by enhancing their skills. Arguably, this is a form of social growth within an SME enabled by the entrepreneurial

leader. The interview question stated, ‘how do you feel about employees developing their skills?’ and the comments below represent the responses given:

*“I’ll always make sure that I’ve got a longer-term plan for everyone’s professional development” (Interview No.11).*

*“We tend to do a lot of just on the on-the-job training here because we are all ex-bankers”. (Interview No.12).*

*“We regularly have a sit down with each individual team member and we’ll review their KPIs and consider their own development “(Interview No.13).*

*“I always ask my staff on an annual basis, where do you want development?” (Interview No.18).*

*“We continually train and develop our staff as you’re putting money back into the community by raising local skillsets. It is the bedrock of our economy. It needs to be very much nurtured and encouraged and that is success” (Interview No.9).*

In summary, entrepreneurial leaders considered developing their employees to be an important element in their social and economic SME growth.

#### 5.6.5 Employee appraisal and enabling social SME growth

Interestingly, the qualitative results showed some enthusiasm for, and use of employee appraisals by entrepreneurial leaders:

*“We regularly sit down with each individual team member and review their KPIs, and part of the review is also their own development. So, we look at kind of where they are in their training. If there are any gaps” (Interview No.13).*

*“It is an important part of the professional growth of the management team” (Interview No.16).*

*“Absolutely. I mean, that’s the pipeline and I always ask them on an annual basis, where do you want development? That’s the succession planning” (Interview No.18).*

In summary, the use of employee appraisals indicates the entrepreneurial leaders’ intention to implement these and invest in their employees. Nonetheless it must be noted as a limitation as the responses were based on knowing best practice as opposed to ‘doing’ best practice in the use of appraisal mechanisms in SMEs.

#### 5.6.6 Employee voice and enabling social SME growth

The employee voice is important and the associated social value this brings to the business can be seen in the comments below:

*“Yes, without doubt our employees are part of the future of the business” (Interview No.1)*

*“I rely on my team to help solve problems...it’s important to me to see the different perspectives of my team. So, we make decisions based on everyone’s feedback” (Interview No.11).*

*“I think it’s useful because there are so many different eyes checking what’s going on in the world and useful to have employee input. So, we encourage everybody to give input and feedback because we don’t know everything.” (Interview No.13).*

*“The employee say is massive, we were pioneers of this and on a weekly basis, every one of those venues would have had a senior meeting with the supervisor and staff and some of the best ideas come from the staff working with the customers on the floor” (Interview No.18).*

*“We have team meetings every Monday morning in the pub and during this time we would ask about issues and challenges in the business and the ideas we used to glean from the team were remarkable as they wanted to do good for our business. Clearly, we would have the final say as sometimes there could*

*be a cost implication and that would have to fit in with the budget” (Interview No.2).*

Ultimately, there is evidence however to suggest that the entrepreneurial leader had the final say in decision making as seen from the comments below:

*“I certainly support employees making suggestions but ultimately the decisions will be made between my business partner and myself” (Interview No.9).*

*“I would say probably I'm a control freak and I know that I am down to every detail. If I'm honest, when it comes to growth of the business, that's very much my direction and decisions” (Interview No.15).*

Entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs are supportive of listening to their employees' ideas. Nevertheless, whilst keen to recognise the need to build a positive culture where employees can be heard, it is arguable from the responses that entrepreneurial leaders also sought to remain in control of the business and have the final say in decision making scenarios.

#### 5.6.7 Conclusion

Using the explanatory sequential approach, the qualitative analysis built on the quantitative analysis delivering a deeper understanding of the conceptual framework and how it illustrates the inextricable relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth. This chapter outlined the qualitative findings from the empirical research obtained from 20 semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurial leaders of growing SMEs.

The next chapter will discuss these findings and triangulate the quantitative (Stage One) and qualitative analysis (Stage Two). It will also integrate the literature where relevant to develop the thesis further and evidence the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss how the research question and research objectives have been achieved. In doing so, it will also illuminate whether entrepreneurial leaders generate social and commercial growth in SMEs. The quantitative and qualitative findings detailed in chapters four and five will be presented in an integrated discussion around the two sources of data analysis, subsequently triangulating the data to inform conclusions. The discussion will also link to the relevant literature, guided by the conceptual framework, and explain the findings toward achieving the overall research aim.

### 6.2 Research aim

As a reminder, the overall aim of this study was to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

### 6.3 Research objectives

Four objectives were established to achieve the research aim:

1. To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth principally in social and economic terms.
2. To design a conceptual framework and attest the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth
3. To explain the significance of augmented SME growth and subsequent implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory, policy, and practice

4. To propose recommendations for future SME policy in this area

#### 6.4 Structure of chapter

This chapter addresses the research objectives based on the secondary and empirical research analysed and presented in chapters four and five. The chapter commences with a discussion on SME growth in economic and social terms commensurate with 'augmented' SME growth (objective 1). Succeeding this the conceptual framework guides the discussion, illustrating the complex relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth (objective 2), and signalling the core contribution of the thesis. The quantitative and qualitative research findings are synthesised, to explain the significance of augmented SME growth and suggest relevant implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory, policy, and practice (objective 3). The final chapter will provide a conclusion and recommendations for entrepreneurial leadership theory and future SME growth policy in this area (objective 4).

#### 6.5 Entrepreneurial leadership enabling augmented SME growth

Entrepreneurial leadership is well positioned as a concept to effect a critical understanding of SMEs and their growth (Pauceanu et al., 2021; Harrison and Leitch 2018; Leitch et al., 2013; McMullan and Harrison 2013; Ng and Kee 2018; Renko et al., 2015). Equally, SME growth is typically determined by the decision-making behaviour of entrepreneurial leaders (Hauser et al., 2020), whose assumed primary purpose is annual profit maximisation (Yazdanfar and Ohman, 2018; Harrison and Leitch, 2018; Ng and Kee, 2018; Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Hermans et al., 2015). Consequently, these two concepts are interdependent and arguably, business growth depends on the entrepreneurial leader's intentions, decisions, and enablement of SME growth. However, augmented SME growth purports the generation of economic and social growth by SME entrepreneurial leaders. It is a concept that recognises entrepreneurial leaders as critical catalysts in economic maximisation and socially



responsible SME growth contributing holistically to socio-economic prosperity. Augmented SME growth combines the components of economic and socially responsible SME growth, and the evidence suggests that this is generated purposively by many entrepreneurial leaders.

In developing an enhanced theory, empirical research was conducted on entrepreneurial leaders to evidence their generation of augmented SME growth.

Arguably SMEs that display augmented growth provide more meaningful impact than the typical 'sales and job creation' metrics that underpin government policy and feature highly in government reporting mechanisms. This is also shown in business support for SME's that requires reciprocal measurable economic outputs to underscore funding claims for economic development. Therefore, this thesis is exploring the entrepreneurial leader's role in the generation of augmented SME growth and exposes (what may be hidden) their contribution to local community prosperity and wellbeing. Before examining and discussing the findings the conceptual framework, (objective 2) is presented again to inform the flow of discussion.

## 6.6 A conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth

The definition of business growth by Penrose (1959) has had much discourse over the years by numerous scholars (Delmar et al., 2003; Davidsson et al., 2013) who argue that business growth must be measured through a multidimensional definition as small business enterprises are varied and complex. Accepting the complexity of SME growth, the widely known and often cited in business growth literature, Per Davidsson and colleagues (2013) identified new opportunities for research into business growth. Research on SME growth to date has focused primarily on the amount and volume of growth. However, Penrose (1959) contends that 'growth' means more than the 'change in amount'. Significantly, this shifts the researcher's gaze from 'amount' to 'process' of growth to create value beyond that of measurable economic growth. Davidsson and Wiklund, (2013 p.179) affirm that "this is a sorely under-researched area, as relationships with antecedents and effects are of most interest". The

conceptual framework below, attests the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth in economic and social terms (objective 2).

The implementation of the conceptual framework using the literature review and empirical data, illuminates the 'socially enabling' entrepreneurial leader and serves to enhance the theory of entrepreneurial leadership. The use of a conceptual framework is a useful guide to inform the research design and data collection with a view to achieving the research aim. The components of the conceptual framework in Figure 2.17 below are read from left to right starting with the concept of 'leadership' and 'entrepreneurship' as the core discipline areas and the essence of the thesis. The literature (chapter 2) established a review on the evolution of leadership and entrepreneurship to the latest theory of leadership known as 'entrepreneurial leadership', primarily pertaining to an economist's perspective.

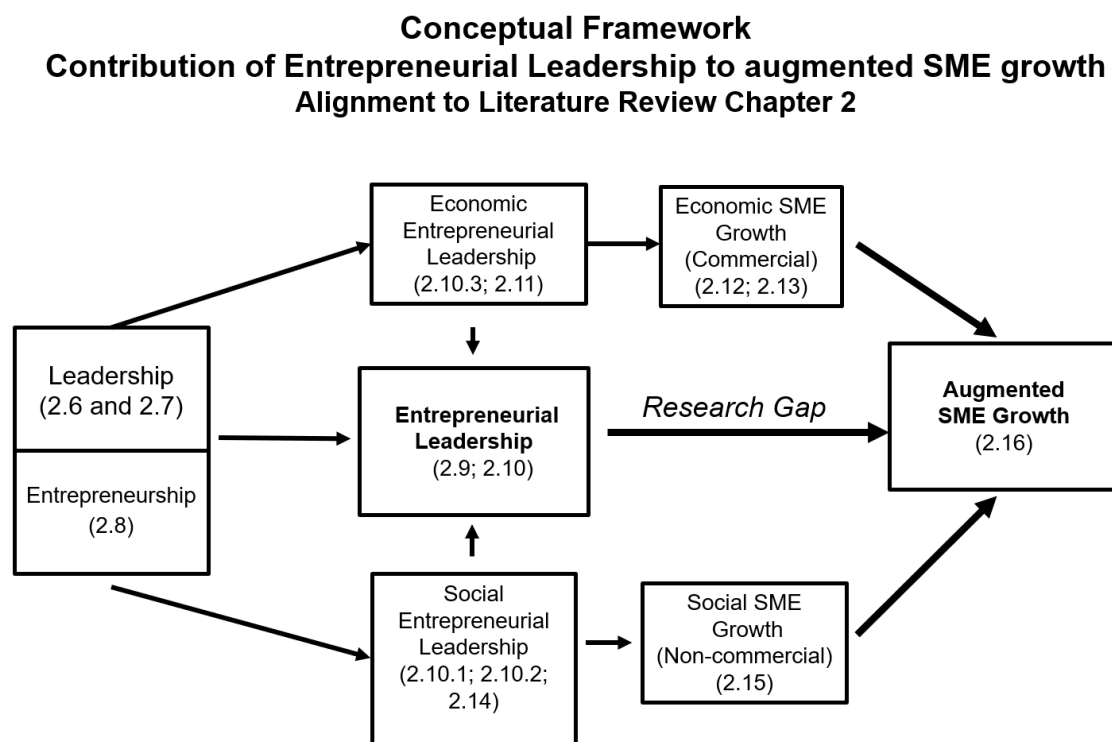


Figure 2.17 The conceptual framework aligned to the literature review (Chapter 2) (Authors contribution)

From this discussion, the literature review explained the advancement of theory in entrepreneurial leadership and established the current focus of theory as 'economic entrepreneurial leadership'. This is positioned at the top pathway in the framework as a plethora of established research exists on how this leads to generating SME economic growth. The role of the economic entrepreneurial leader was then explored in the literature, to understand the economic and commercial motivations of entrepreneurial leaders. The analysis of the literature on economic motivations of entrepreneurial leaders and widespread scholarly research, raises the research question on the exclusion of socially enabling roles of entrepreneurial leaders. Moving then to the bottom pathway, the literature on social entrepreneurial leadership was explored to understand the intentions and decisions of social entrepreneurial leaders and their motivation for responsible social SME growth. The social enabling characteristics of leaders are well established in the leadership literature in terms of servant, ethical and authentic leadership however these are arguably 'missing' in the existing theory of entrepreneurial leadership. This reveals the research gap of the thesis and conceptualises a 'nuanced' entrepreneurial leadership encompassing 'economically enabled leadership' and 'socially enabled leadership' generating 'augmented growth' in SMEs. Arguably such leadership delivers economic growth alongside socially responsible growth additionally providing a refreshed understanding of SME growth. This is aligned to Porter and Kramer (2006 p. 92), purporting "economic and social growth to be mutually reinforcing". Furthermore, Davidsson and Wiklund (2006 p. 54) assert that "multiple indicators of growth give richer information and therefore enhance single growth indicators". Therefore, the true contribution of the socially enabling entrepreneurial leader in SMEs, both to the economy and to wider society may be revealed through their generation of augmented SME growth.

#### 6.7 A composite summary table of key findings: Entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in NI SMEs

For this research, the sample included any SMEs between 0-249 employees facilitating the focus on the unit of analysis and independent variable, the entrepreneurial leader and augmented SME growth the dependent variable.

The literature research identified the economic intentions and a paucity of research (Pauceanu, 2021) on the socially enabling intentions of the entrepreneurial leader (objective one) leading to a conceptual framework to guide the empirical research (objective two). Hence, the literature analysis informed questionnaire design around the entrepreneurial leaders' personal, economic, and social intentions for generating augmented SME growth. The survey collected quantitative data on the entrepreneurial leader personally, followed by economic intentions and finally social intentions. From this emerged four key themes, informing stage two of the explanatory sequential approach and guided the research on the collection of qualitative data from twenty semi structured in-depth interviews with SME entrepreneurial leaders. The four key themes emerging from the survey analysis informed the scope of the in-depth semi structured interview questions, to explore deeper qualitative insights toward answering the research question and achieving the research aim. Theme A was the entrepreneurial leader personal values and intentions, followed by Theme B, economic enabling intentions, Theme C social enabling intentions, extending to SMEs with employees, Theme D. The qualitative interviews were transcribed, uploaded to NVivo12, and coded using child nodes around the four themes. In this discussion chapter, triangulating the data from chapter 4 and 5 aligned to the four key themes is relevant to reaching the research aim and corroborating the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

Triangulation of Theme A empirical findings are examined in section (6.8), contextualising the entrepreneurial leader personally and their perceived lifestyle values, intentions and perceptions that influenced their role in augmented SME growth. Theme B, section (6.9), discusses the empirical findings on the entrepreneurial leader's role in enabling economic SME growth. Theme C discusses (6.10) the empirical findings on the entrepreneurial leader's role in enabling SME social growth. Finally, Theme D (6.11) discusses the empirical findings on the entrepreneurial leader's role in enabling social growth through employees. The four themes once discussed conclude the explanation of the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth (6.12). Table 6.1 below displays a composite summary of key findings. Starting from the left column the table identifies the

independent variable (the entrepreneurial leader) the dependent variable (SME growth) and the method of data analysis (survey/test). The table is then populated with the top line results of the qualitative findings.

<b>Composite summary table of key findings</b>				
<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Dependant Variable</b>	<b>Method of analysis</b>	<b>Quantitative Findings summary</b>	<b>Qualitative Findings Summary</b>
The entrepreneurial leader lifestyle values, intentions, and perceptions		Flat Data (Likert)	83% selected work life balance as important-extremely important.	<p><b>Theme A</b> Entrepreneurial Leader Work lifestyle values and intentions</p> <p>Over three quarters of entrepreneurial leaders interviewed agreed that work life balance is important to their lifestyle, and they intentionally factor it in for their wellbeing.</p>
		Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	No significant difference in the entrepreneurial leaders view of the importance of lifestyle values and wellbeing in relation to size of SME	
		Flat Data (Likert)	87% indicated that being perceived as a 'caring leader' is important and more important than being successful (40%) knowledgeable (53%)	

		Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	No significant difference in SME size and entrepreneurial leaders' perception by stakeholders (community and employees).	The interviews revealed that most entrepreneurial leaders prefer to be perceived as a relational and compassionate leader..." a safe pair of hands...solid Citizen"
The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth	Importance of enabling economic SME growth	Flat Data (Likert)	74% entrepreneurial leaders indicated it was important to grow their SME.	<b>Theme B</b> <b>Entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth</b>
	Obstacles to SME growth: Finance/ capability/ technology/ time v size	Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	'Growing my business is', the tests showed that $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 9.74, P = 0.008$ . meaning there is a significant association between the sizes of business and the importance of 'growing my business'. 10+ SMEs rated growing their business more important.	Interviews with entrepreneurial leaders show that they have embedded intentions to enable economic growth in their business in the next 3 years.
		Flat Data (Likert)	Managing projects and time pressures rated most important obstacle to business growth (38%) followed by finance (30%). Least important	

<p>The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth</p>	<p>Obstacles to SME growth Covid19/ Brexit</p> <p>Priority Measures (Sales, profit, job creation)</p>	<p>Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)</p> <p>Flat data (Likert)</p> <p>Kruskal-Wallis Test</p> <p>Flat Data (Likert)</p> <p>Kruska- Wallis Test</p>	<p>capability and skills (17%).</p> <p>Finance: No significance Technology: No significance Time Pressure: No significance Capability: Significance in <math>\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 8.23, P = 0.016</math>. Capability is more of a challenge in 10+ SMEs.</p> <p>44% Brexit - Negligible Impact 10% positive 61% Covid – Negative Impact 20% positive</p> <p>Brexit/Covid no significance v size.</p> <p>49% Profit most important 29% Sales most important 5% Job creation – most important 16% Connecting with community -most important but also 43% least important. 60% of SMEs created or maintained jobs in last 12 months.</p>	
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	<p>Primary Intentions enabling economic SME growth</p>	<p>(3 Sizes SME)</p> <p>Chi squared Test</p> <p>Flat Data (Likert)</p> <p>Chi Square Test</p>	<p>No significant relationship in size and importance of sales / profit.</p> <p>Job Creation significant in relation to SME size <math>\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 19.54, P = 0.001</math>. The bigger the SME the more important job creation.</p> <p>Importance of connecting to community significant <math>\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 16.23, P = 0.001</math> The larger the business the less important to connect with the community.</p> <p>Job creation in last 12 months significant to SME size <math>\chi^2 (6, n = 204) = 121.91, P &lt; 0.001, Phi = 0.399</math>. SMEs with employees grew or sustained employment. No job creation in zero employees.</p> <p>95% of SME entrepreneurial leaders intend to sustain and grow their SME in the next 3 years. 5% scale back their business.</p>	<p>There were significant references to the</p>
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			<p>Significant in relation to size <math>\chi^2 (6, n = 204) = 32.525, P &lt; 0.001, \Phi = 0.399</math>.</p> <p>Zero 'ees; 14% reported scaling back more than 10+.</p>	<p>importance of financial growth through the 20 interviews. Profit maximisation is only one element of what business growth means to entrepreneurial leaders</p>
The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth	Importance of engaging in community activities	<p>Flat Data (Likert)</p> <p>Kruskal-Wallis Test</p>	<p>Importance of engaging in community activities. Most popular - supporting young enterprise initiatives (48.5%) attending local B2B events at 48% of SMEs. Least popular – Board of governor at school.</p> <p>Educational placement showed significance <math>\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 18.22, p = 0.001</math> 10+employees more important activity.</p>	<p><b>Theme C</b> <b>Entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth</b></p> <p>The data indicates a conscious social ethos embedded in entrepreneurial leaders' daily business activities</p> <p>All entrepreneurial leaders engaged in non-commercial/social activities and believe they contribute to the greater good (social impact) within their communities. The interviews revealed that intentions to grow a business socially through community engagement is a growing interest in entrepreneurial leaders regardless of size.</p>
	Community Activities enabling social SME growth	Flat Data	<p>Entrepreneurial leaders engaged on average 2.5 social/community activities whilst running their business. 51%</p>	

<p>The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth</p>	<p>Community Relations and enabling social SME growth</p>	<p>SPSS Frequencies analysis on percentage engaged in activity.</p> <p>Flat Data (Likert Scale)</p>	<p>sponsor local charities. Out of the 8 different types of activities in relation to business size, sponsoring local charities was the most popular activity</p> <p>Analysis provides evidence of engagement in all types of activities. SMEs with 10+ employees showed that 72% engage in sponsoring local charities, followed by Group 2 (1-9 employees) at 46%. It is interesting to note that the SMEs with zero employees also contribute significantly to local charities 32%.</p> <p>66% of entrepreneurial leaders agree it is important to have a good relationship with their local community. 12% unimportant to have a good relationship with the community.</p> <p>Community as stakeholder in SME – 49% selected important. Embedding my business in local community development activities 49% selected important.</p>	<p>A broad range of types of community activities were highlighted during the interviews with a high response on sponsoring local charities.</p> <p>Generally, the evidence from the interviews suggests that entrepreneurial leaders value building relationships with the community regardless of business size.</p>
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The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth	Social responsibility	Kruskal-Wallis Test	<p>Reciprocal relationships 34% selected important.</p> <p>No significant association between business size and entrepreneurial leaders enabling community relationships. Indicates unity of importance in community relations across all business sizes.</p>	
		Flat Data (Likert)	<p>% Selecting important in their SME:</p> <p>79% ethics in supply chain 76% efficiency and lean 75% optimising energy 62% carbon emissions 49% environmental processes.</p>	
		Kruskal-Wallis	<p>Significant only in efficiency and lean processes <math>\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 7.59, p = 0.02</math> SMEs with 10+ employees said more important.</p>	Out of the 20 interviews conducted, almost all the entrepreneurial leaders spoke of the importance of sustainability and the green agenda.
	Measurement of non-financial data v size	Flat Data (Likert)	<p>85% collect Customer feedback 52% Employee Feedback 29% Community engagement measures</p> <p>71% of SMEs do not see the value in collecting social impact data, do not know how to collect the</p>	

The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth		Chi Square Test	<p>data, or do not see any merit in collecting such.</p> <p>Statistical significance in some tests. Significance in 10+ (size) more likely to collect data on community engagement.</p> <p><math>\chi^2 (4, n = 204) = 22.028</math>, <math>p = 0.001</math>, <math>\Phi = 0.329</math></p> <p>Less likely in 0-9 (Size)</p> <p>Out of 8 types of data collected 6 had significance regarding size of business evidencing that the larger the business the more likely to collect non-financial data. Generally, the bigger the business the more non-financial data is collected for decision making.</p>	In general, most entrepreneurial leaders (0-9) when asked do not account for social impact as a measure of business growth/performance. Entrepreneurial leaders only collected non-financial data for awards or decision making for business improvement processes.
The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth through employees	Community engagement enabling social growth through employees	Flat Data (Likert)  Kruskal-Wallis Test	<p>Encourage employees in community activities 38% of entrepreneurial leaders found this important.</p> <p>No significance between size of business and employee engagement in community activities</p>	<p><b>Theme D</b></p> <p><b>Entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth through employees.</b></p> <p>Entrepreneurial leaders actively encouraged this employee activity but not</p>

The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth through employees	Employee Wellbeing	Flat Data (Likert)  Kruskal-Wallis Test	94% of entrepreneurial leaders said employee wellbeing was important/extremely important for business growth  No significance between size of business and employee wellbeing	necessarily pay employees for doing so.  Entrepreneurial leader interviews indicated that employee wellbeing is important regardless of size.
	Employee skills and knowledge Development	Flat Data (Likert)  Kruskal-Wallis Test	89% ranked employee development as important for employees  No significance between size of business and employee development	Employee development is important to entrepreneurial leaders regardless of size.
	Employee Appraisal and social growth	Flat Data (Likert)	68% of entrepreneurial leaders selected the option important or extremely important for employee appraisals.	Entrepreneurial leaders in general value appraisal processes for employees but smaller businesses are more informal in their approach.

	Employee Voice	Kruskal-Wallis Test	Significance with business size $\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 15.69, p = 0.001$ More important in 10+ SMEs	Entrepreneurial leaders in general value the employee voice for enhancing social growth in SMEs.
		Flat Data (Likert)	Employee voice was selected important by 76% of entrepreneurial leaders.	
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	No significant association in business size and employees having a say in the business	

Table 6.1 Composite summary of key findings

## 6.8 Theme A: Entrepreneurial leadership work lifestyle values, intentions, and perceptions

### 6.8.1 Introduction

Triangulating the data from chapter four quantitative and chapter five qualitative data facilitates a discussion to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth, principally in economic and social terms (objective 1). This is where the entrepreneurial leaders work lifestyle values, intentions and perceptions are considered, and their subsequent impact on the decision making to generate augmented SME growth (Simba and Thai, 2019; Gherhes et al., 2016; Guieu and Guieu., 2014; Ajzen, 1991, 2019). The literature reviewed the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership and from the quantitative (survey results) and qualitative

findings, Theme A emerged. Theme A helps to explain the entrepreneurial leaders personal work lifestyle values informing their social enabling intentions and decisions toward evidencing their relationship with social SME growth (objective 1 and 2) and subsequent generation of augmented growth.

The decisions of the entrepreneurial leader are a critical factor in generating SME growth success outputs (Leitch et al., 2018, Simba and Thai, 2019) and are underpinned by the entrepreneurial leader's motivation, intention, and goal setting as significant factors in business growth. Makki and Pukkinen (2000) purport that there are three owner manager drivers to small business growth, and these are intention, ability, and opportunity to grow. This concurs with Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour and reasoned action. Ajzen (1991, 2019) argues that there is a strong relationship between individual capability and motivation, and this is underpinned by the theory of planned behaviour that provides a fuller understanding of motivation, business growth and a consideration of resources and possible opportunities to grow a business. Understanding the entrepreneurial work lifestyle values helps to explain the contribution of entrepreneurial leaders to generating augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

#### 6.8.2 Entrepreneurial leader and work lifestyle values

Exploring the entrepreneurial leaders work lifestyle values the quantitative findings found 83% of respondents selected maintenance of work-life balance as a motivator and important to their lifestyles. This concurs with the ERC (2018) reporting that 82.8% of entrepreneurial leaders preferred to have greater flexibility for their personal and family life. Interestingly, in this survey only 60% of entrepreneurial leaders thought increasing leisure time outside the office lifestyle was important although 79% indicated flexibility was important when leading their business to maintain their work life balance concurring with Weber et al. (2015). The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed there was no difference in intentions for work-life balance, confirming a consensus amongst these entrepreneurial leaders of the importance of work-life balance in SME growth, regardless of business size.

The qualitative findings enriched these findings further and from the 20 qualitative interviews, most entrepreneurial leaders said they valued a work life balance. The following response was typical:

*“Work life balance is absolutely 100 percent important to me. I am doing what I'm doing now because I want a work life balance” (Interview No.11).*

This corresponds with research conducted by Douglas and Shepherd (2000), who found from their research that personal goals like independence and flexibility were stated as some of the main reasons for starting and running a business:

*“So, the reason that I set up my own business was to be able to have a better work life balance...I can now control my time at work” (Interview No.3).*

In response to why work life balance was important to entrepreneurial leaders the following response provides some explanation:

*“What's important is your health. I had a health scare three years ago where I had a heart episode... So that was a wakeup call” (Interview No.18).*

Indeed Weber et al. (2015) identified from their research the importance of family time for strategic SME growth and owner preparedness, and this was supported in the responses:

*“So now I am dedicated to my work life balance and that means more time with my family” (Interview No.11).*

*“I spend a lot of time with the family. We go out as a family, we socialise as a family, and that's extremely important to me” (Interview No.10).*

*“My personal objective is spending more time with the family at this stage” (Interview No.1).*



When explaining why work life balance was important to entrepreneurial leaders, many spoke of their health and well-being. Gherhes et al. (2016) argues that there is a complex network of pressurised factors that can influence decision making and subsequent performance for an entrepreneurial leader's enterprise. These factors include the disproportionate reliance on the entrepreneurial leader, their experience, and their time to develop resilience before business failure ensues. Some survey responses from leaders indicated a struggle with their work life balance, particularly during a challenging time in their business growth journey:

*"I'm awful at managing my work life balance... I just knock out the hours and I think when it's your own business you just have to do it. I would answer emails at eleven half eleven at night and over the weekend" (Interview No.12).*

*"In dark times and days when we have difficult clients or bad debt no-matter how hard I try, I take the work home. And the duvet demons hit you at three o'clock in the morning and you wake up, go, oh, why am I doing this" (Interview No.11).*

*"So, switching off, is extremely difficult, especially if your name is above the door" (Interview No.10).*

This infers that there is a cognitive struggle for many entrepreneurial leaders in their quest to sustain a positive work life balance. This inclination may have implications on their values around their pursuit of profit and the importance of work life balance for themselves and/or their employees.

### 6.8.3 Entrepreneurial leaders and personal well-being

An entrepreneurial leader's personal well-being is important in considering their intentions to generate augmented SME growth. Understandably, increased profitability may be the driver of most entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs, however as indicated many of these businesses are driven by independence, increased leisure time, family flexibility and personal job satisfaction (Douglas, 2013; Weber et al., 2015). Arguably

therefore, today's entrepreneurial leaders recognise the importance of wellbeing for business success.

The survey evidenced that personal wellbeing was important to entrepreneurial leaders, with 93% rating this as important for themselves personally. Hazlehurst (2021 p.45) argues "The leaders that have thrived during the pandemic are those that acknowledged that work is not the only, or even the main thing in most people's lives, thus learning to embrace their human side".

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted and there was no significant association between business size and 'importance of my own well-being'. This was also demonstrated across the 20 interviews where around half of respondents made references to wellbeing.

*"My own wellbeing is so closely tied in with exercise" (Interview No.1).*

*"If I can I build in some form of exercise two or three times a week, I find my creative thought is multiplied by 10 (Interview No.1).*

Some connected their wellbeing activities to health activities but also to relaxation and socialisation:

*"With regards my relaxation and wellbeing I like walking, swimming, going to the gym and drinking wine!" (Interview No.12)*

*Family pets are also important to entrepreneurial leader well-being, and enduring working from home during the pandemic, wellbeing was motivated by 'caring' of family pets (Interview No.7).*

*"I would do a lot of walking. I have two dogs and with working from home all day I kind of try and mix it up and walk the dogs twice a day (Interview No.5).*

Whilst not significant in Kruskal-Wallis, the results showed that many entrepreneurial leaders did value the importance of their work life balance, health, and wellbeing

indicating that this may be an important contribution to the generation of augmented SME growth (Gherhes et al., 2016; Douglas, 2013; Welbourne et al., 2012).

#### 6.8.4 Entrepreneurial leader and stakeholder perceptions

Small businesses are highly dependent on relationships with banks, suppliers, and customers (Degeorge and Faylle, 2011) and hence stakeholder perception is important to entrepreneurial leaders. The perceived 'caring' quality of entrepreneurial leaders appears to be important in terms of cultivating positive stakeholder relationships whether they have employees or not.

Extensive research by Gherhes et al. (2016) concluded that 22-25% of SME entrepreneurial leaders valued non-economic impacts as a measure of success and were not necessarily driven by the financial imperatives. This concurred with the empirical analysis for this research, where SME entrepreneurial leaders valued their stakeholder perceptions of them within their communities and this was of importance to them. This also agrees with some of the established leadership theories that promote socially responsible outcomes. Indeed, the vision of Greenleaf (1977) was that servant leadership is a compulsion to care for others and serve the common good in society. Research by Melchar (2010) endorses the servant leaders' natural cognition of developing community cohesion whereby the entrepreneurial leader is engaged in contributing to external societal organisations outside their business.

Self-awareness in authentic leadership is explained by Walumbwa et al. (2008) as an understanding of how an individual evaluates and makes sense of their worldview and how these impact on their self-perception. This relates to the 'caring' self-perception of the entrepreneurial leader and how they sought to be perceived through their stakeholder lens (Sharif and Scandura, 2014). Other scholars indicate the 'caring' persona of leaders whereby authentic leadership displays a behaviour that shows accountability for more than just themselves (Gray et al., 2016; Sheehan et al., 2016). Furthermore, when leadership is operated within a collective (Avolio et al., 2009) relationships tend to be more about considering 'others' and go beyond individual self-interests.

Empirically, the findings showed that entrepreneurial leaders liked to be identified as a 'caring leader' and 87% of the sample indicated that this was important to them as individuals. Just over half of the entrepreneurial leaders believed that 'knowledgeable' was an important perception of an entrepreneurial leader, based on the behaviour of attending conferences to continually learn and self-improve. Moreover, it was interesting to note that the importance of being perceived as 'successful' by community stakeholders was only selected as important by 40% of entrepreneurial leaders. The ERC (2018) reported that 44.5% of entrepreneurial leaders in NI wanted to 'fulfil a personal vision of becoming a successful business leader in my community'. This confirms firstly that it is not clear what 'success' means and that stakeholder perception of success is not necessarily financially driven. Hence, the perception of being seen as a 'caring leader' may be seen as important for SME success.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted to examine the associations between the three sizes of business group and tested against the statements of being perceived as 'caring', 'knowledgeable' and 'successful' by stakeholders. The correlations were again weak with no significant association between size of business and the importance of stakeholder perceptions of entrepreneurial leaders within their community. The 'caring values as a leader' from the data showed that this was the most important perception from stakeholders in the community and to be known as 'successful' or 'knowledgeable' was less important.

The qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into how entrepreneurial leaders preferred to be perceived by stakeholders within their community. There were multiple referenced responses from 20 interviews by participants and a selection of the entrepreneurial leaders perceived stakeholder descriptions are included below. Entrepreneurial leaders preferred to be described by stakeholders as:

*"A solid citizen (Interview No.1), "Warm, authentic, friendly, open (Interview No.12), "caring and honest" (Interview No. 13), "Hardworking" (Interview No.18); "Professional" (Interview, No.20), "Helpful, it is not all about the money" (Interview No.6), "Safe pair of hands" (Interview, No.7), "Can trust me to listen" (Interview No.19).*

The research analysis and subsequent discussion suggests entrepreneurial leaders in SMEs valued managing their work life balance to facilitate their family life, lifestyle, and personal wellbeing whilst generating augmented SME growth. They were also influenced by the perceptions of 'others' in the form of stakeholders that include customers, suppliers, and their employees. There was a strong 'caring value' demonstrated in the sample of entrepreneurial leaders of NI SMEs suggesting that the perceptions of others, including, if applicable their employee stakeholders, was important to them.

The discussion on Theme A therefore signals that entrepreneurial leaders appear to have a socially responsible consciousness in relation to themselves, their employees, and their SME growth, which corresponds with the literature (Gray et al., 2016; Sheehan et al., 2016; Melchar, 2010; Avolio et al., 2009). This suggests SME entrepreneurial leaders value the importance of socially responsible growth in relation to their work-life balance, wellbeing, and stakeholder perceptions (objective 2). Therefore, the discussion on the entrepreneurial leaders work lifestyle balance and wellbeing values showed that these factors are aligned to the research aim of evidencing the entrepreneurial leader's contribution to the generation of augmented SME growth (objective 3).

Implications for policy from objective one (Theme A), realises the relative importance of attributes relating to the entrepreneurial leader's lifestyle, wellbeing, and stakeholder perceptions to generate augmented SME growth. What this could mean for entrepreneurial leaders is that they understand the importance of work life balance and wellbeing for themselves and their families personally whilst operating their SME on a day-to-day basis instead of pressure to continually pursue economic growth. This change of mindset could influence more people to start-up their own business knowing that it is something that entrepreneurial leaders consider to be important. It is also something that government could consider as part of the developing the supporting elements of an entrepreneurial ecosystem within a nation. Therefore, knowledge on enabling personal lifestyle and stakeholder relationships to generate augmented SME growth could be transformative in entrepreneurial leadership decisions for local socio-economic development.

## 6.9 Theme B: The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic SME growth

### 6.9.1 Introduction

To fully achieve objective one, it is pertinent to discuss the findings on how the economically enabling entrepreneurial leader generated augmented SME growth. It appears there is little consensus around the phenomenon of SME growth and the literature is largely fragmented (Wiklund et al., 2009). Another challenge of researching SME growth is the natural assumption by researchers that SME growth is measured in amounts and is the preferred outcome by business leaders (Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Harrison and Leitch, 2018; Ng and Kee, 2018). Indeed, entrepreneurial leaders use SME sales growth as a measure of performance (Barkham et al., 1996), however Cohen (2020 p.24) argues that “the current system is dictating our values...just to make money and that is a limited definition of success”.

### 6.9.2 Importance of entrepreneurial leadership enabling economic SME growth

Gray (2000), McKelvie et al. (2017) and Maki and Pukkinen (2000) argue that SME growth is neither a clearly evidenced pathway nor just a matter of luck, instead it is the pursuit of the owner manager to reach desired business outcomes in economic terms. Perren's (1999 p.369) research finds that the desire to succeed, where success equates with business growth and is financially oriented, is “vital in such small firms, being an essential growth driver”.

When exploring the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth importance, the survey data showed that almost three-quarters (74%) of entrepreneurial leaders indicated growing their business was important.

Noting that 12% of entrepreneurial leaders did not intend to grow their business was surprising. However, considering this alongside the findings in relation to their health

and wellbeing, could suggest they are operating 'lifestyle businesses' where work life balance and wellbeing are equally important factors. This would support Douglas (2013) and Weber et al. (2015) research which proposes SMEs to be driven by independence, increased leisure time, family flexibility objectives and personal job satisfaction. These are more associated with the 'social value' factors that impact on societal prosperity and well-being. Anderson and Ullah (2014 p.328) called this the "condition of smallness" and a lack of intention to grow. They used data from 2.5K businesses through the Federation of Small Business on the condition of smallness and argued that small businesses purposively stay small so that they do not have to employ more people.

Regarding other indicators of SME growth, the importance of rapid growth for exit scored only 11% and increasing export sales as a measure of growth was preferred by 15% of respondents. The utilisation of government support interventions was also deemed to be important by 13% of SMEs. Interestingly, the ERC (2018) reported on average that 75% of businesses with 1-9 employees prefer to keep their business 'similar to how it operates now' and comparing this with the respondents in this research, 60% intended to have steady growth over the next three years, with 19% indicating that sustaining their business growth was the intention. Given the choice it was interesting to note that 5% of the entrepreneurial leaders indicated that they wanted to 'scale down' their SME.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted and tested against five statements about how the entrepreneurial leader rated the importance of economic business growth. Out of the five statements only one showed significance, 'Growing my business is...'. The test suggests that although all 3 sizes of business groups had a median value of 4 (important), a statistical significance was realised between the zero-employee group and the 10+ group of business sizes. This suggests that the bigger the SME the more important it was to grow the business financially and could suggest that the 'self-employed' sole trader was happy to sustain the status quo in a more lifestyle orientated decision not to grow the business but to merely sustain it.

To provide deeper insight into the importance of economic growth for entrepreneurial leaders the question was posed "Is it important to grow your business financially year

on year?” There were multiple references to the importance of financial growth over the 20 interviews and some of the comments are presented below:

*“Financial profit is so important as it allows me to reinvest back into the business and afford a certain lifestyle” (Interview No.5)*

*“I think we all want to make money in our business...though every opportunity I get I think how this is going to improve my business and make it better...constantly striving to make it more profitable” (Interview No. 6).*

To further establish the importance of sustaining SME economic growth and gaining insights into the entrepreneurial leaders’ ambitions for economic growth, the qualitative interview questioned their ‘hopes for the future growth of the business’. This is aligned to Storey’s (1994) research who argues that there are three factors that stimulate business growth in SMEs, and these are a blend of the owner manager’s ambitions, intentions, and competencies. It was clear from the comments below that the entrepreneurial leaders were committed to sustaining economic growth and knew what growth meant to them as individuals:

*“...5-10% growth year on year” (Interview No.3).*

*“...to scale it and continue to make money” (Interview No.4).*

*“...grow organically without stress” (Interview No.7).*

*“We want to grow geographically” (Interview No.1).*

As indicated by Storey (1994), the factors that stimulate growth in a small business can depend on the decision making of the entrepreneurial leader. Wiklund and Shepherd (2003 p.191) argue that “Psychologists, concerned with all aspects of human behaviour, have a more diverse view of the motives underlying economic behaviour”. The qualitative data provided insight into this diverse view and suggested that economic goals were important but not necessarily the primary driver for entrepreneurial leaders:

*“Yeah...financial growth is important...but not at any cost” (Interview No.7).*

*“I actually want to make less money, do less hours and spend more time with my family enjoying the money I make” (Interview No.10).*



*“Financial goals are important metrics for my business...but a business is much more than pounds and pence” (Interview No.8).*

This continued into the compelling references from entrepreneurial leaders to their personal lifestyles and wellbeing that also indicated drivers beyond economic SME growth:

*“My hopes for the future of my business are that I can take more time off for myself” (Interview No.15).*

*“The key thing for me for hopes is that I sustain and maintain my business growth year on year and sustain my lifestyle and support kids at university” (Interview No.5).*

Further to lifestyle benefits of SME growth, entrepreneurial leaders also suggested that beyond economic impact, the ‘hope’ for their business was to generate positive ‘social’ impact connected through generating employment opportunities within their local community:

*“I want to grow through innovating new products and employ people and give local people job security” (Interview No.13).*

*“I want to continue to make a difference for individuals and people’s lives” (Interview No.14).*

*“To have permanent employees and a bigger team to eradicate fuel poverty” (Interview No.20).*

The evidence suggests that entrepreneurial leaders demonstrated their commitment to driving economic outputs, but they were also consciously seeking to generate social value through creating jobs in the local community and wider society. This is endorsed by Davidsson and Wiklund (2006 p.50) who concede that “entrepreneurial leadership research must also take an interest in value creation at a societal level”. Indeed, the discussion thus far indicates that the literature on economic growth in SME is well established (Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Harrison and Leitch, 2018; Ng and Kee, 2018) however there is less literature around reasons for not financially growing your SME (Anderson and Ullah, 2014). This highlights the aim of the research to better understand the contribution of SME entrepreneurial leaders to both economic and

social value in their communities commensurate with augmented SME growth. To fully investigate economic SME growth, it is prudent to consider other factors that may impede growth, beyond the intentions of entrepreneurial leaders. The following discussion explores obstacles to SME economic growth and the associated responses from SME entrepreneurial leaders.

### 6.9.3 Obstacles to economic SME growth

Striving to uphold economic growth in an SME is not without its challenges. In considering obstacles to business growth, this depends on the entrepreneurial leader's interpretation, be that positive or negative, of the various obstacles to business growth whether internal or external obstacles. It is important to acknowledge the obstacles to SME growth and consider if they have an impact on the entrepreneurial leader's contribution to generating augmented SME growth in a Northern Ireland context.

Several studies in the 1990's took place to measure the impact of motivation of the business owner on SME growth using a longitudinal design measuring SME growth within a certain amount of time and the impact of the business owner's motivation (Bellu and Sherman, 1995; Kolvereid and Bullvåg, 1996). The results of these studies found that there is some relationship between motivation and business growth but not a strong correlation. A limitation to these studies was that other variables were not considered outside motivation and growth, for example owner manager capability, access to resources and macro-economic conditions (Colvin and Slevin, 1997).

For this research, obstacles were categorised into essential internal resource categories of Finance, Capability/Skills, Technology and Time. Respondents were then asked rank in order of importance, the internal obstacles they perceived pertinent to their SME growth in the next three years.

The results revealed that 'being time poor' was the biggest obstacle for entrepreneurial leaders and SME growth. Indeed, 38% of respondents selected this as the most important obstacle to SME growth. The qualitative interviews questioned "what could challenge your business in the next three years" and the comments below are aligned to the internal obstacle of being 'time poor' for entrepreneurial leaders:

*“A continued reliance on me” (Interview No.1).*

*“I think it is a challenge for all entrepreneurs to find the time” (Interview No. 6).*

*“I am limited by the amount of hours in the week and the income I can generate (Interview No.5).*

This confirms the importance of time to the entrepreneurial leader and the limited individual resource in contributing to augmented SME growth, particularly the zero-employee group. Possibly this could have implications for the SME entrepreneurial leaders limited time to spend contributing to social SME growth especially if financial imperatives are more important at that point in time when SME survival is paramount.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted to examine the three sizes of business group and test for associations between the rankings of importance regarding internal obstacles to business growth for these groups. The result suggests that capability/skills are more of a challenge for entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs who have 10+ employees than those with zero employees. It is therefore arguable that sole entrepreneurial leaders themselves can have challenges of capability where they need to externally resource their SME growth with experts. Davidsson and Wiklund, (2006) argue that the entrepreneurial leader’s capabilities are instrumental for generating growth of sales and other outcomes culminating in SME growth. Combined with the lack of time as an internal obstacle and the need for SME capability development the comments below reflect these obstacles for SME growth:

*“I think it is a challenge for all entrepreneurs to pay for their own upskilling or cognitive development” (Interview No. 6).*

*“Staffing is a challenge for my business” (Interview No. 2).*

These findings indicate that whilst SME entrepreneurial leaders are time poor, and drawing on earlier results around well-being, a tension exists between the time required to sustain their augmented SME growth whilst upholding their work life balance and wellbeing. In accepting this tension, the findings suggest entrepreneurial leaders must be purposeful in generating augmented SME growth.

External obstacles to SME growth include elements such as macro regional resources, infrastructure, and government support mechanisms (Storey 1994; Glancey 1998;

Mitra and Matlay 2000; Shaw and Conway 2000). Since SME growth is determined by adaption to change those entrepreneurial leaders who are agile to changes in the external environment are more likely to have high growth intentions (Gray, 2002). Morrison et al. (2003) argue that growth orientated SMEs are balanced around the three factors of entrepreneurial intention, business acumen and opportunities in the wider macro-environment and that all three are interdependent.

The Northern Ireland macro-environment has in the past 24 months been particularly challenging for SMEs and presented two major obstacles for SMEs to navigate: the Covid19 global pandemic and the implementation of Brexit policies and subsequent complexities around the impact of the Northern Ireland protocol.

Entrepreneurial leaders were asked about the likely impact of Covid19 on their SME as an external obstacle and 61% indicated a negative impact whilst 20% suggested Covid19 had a positive impact on their business, particularly the escalated use of technology to improve business processes. There was no significant difference in business size.

Given the Covid19 pandemic, it was interesting to note that there were multiple references to this during the interviews. Out of these references, almost all entrepreneurial leaders referred to the challenges of Covid19 and just over three quarters referred to the opportunities that entrepreneurial leaders embraced for their business growth. This indicates there were both positive and negative responses from entrepreneurial leader's thinking regarding the impact of Covid19 on the growth of NI SMEs.

Negative responses to Covid19 that presented obstacles to the entrepreneurial leader's decisions around SME growth included:

*"I suppose in the last year because of Covid our books dropped by probably somewhere between 80 and 90 percent" (Interview No.12).*

*"Covid has been the biggest challenge to me" (Interview No.4)*

*"I just think there is going to be a tremendous fallout from Covid in terms of bounce back recovery...it is going to be a bumpy couple of years" (Interview No.9).*

Positive participant responses to Covid19, suggesting an opportunity for SME growth are illustrated below:

*“Frankly Covid and Brexit’s impact has been actually a net positive... as a real position of opportunity for everyone” (Interview No.11).*

*“Covid and lockdown have a made me recognise the benefits of taking a little more care of myself and forcing me to get a bit more of a balance” (Interview No.13).*

*“Covid meant we re-invented our business and will never go back” (Interview No.16).*

The research notes that the impact of Covid19 was not entirely an obstacle to all entrepreneurial leaders generating augmented SME growth. Further to this, entrepreneurial leaders were also asked about the impact of Brexit on their SME growth, illustrated in the bar Chart 6.1 below. This relates to objective one where the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth is examined in social and economic terms, toward contributing to augmented SME growth.

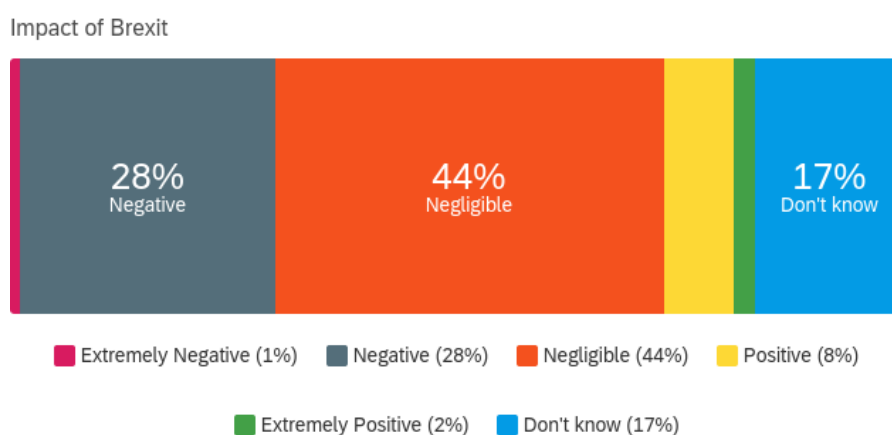


Chart 6.1 Detailed breakdown of impact of Brexit on surveyed SMEs

From the survey data, 28% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated that Brexit had a negative effect on their business whilst overall 10% indicated a positive impact on their business. It was interesting to note that 17% of entrepreneurial leaders did not know

yet the impact of Brexit on their SME at that time. Therefore, there is a range of impacts from Brexit however the survey data shows that many entrepreneurial leaders did not limit their contribution to augmented growth because of Brexit.

A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated no significant association between business size and impact of Brexit suggesting the percentages above to be generally applicable to all sizes of SMEs.

Impact of Brexit was also one of the interview questions posed to entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs. There were two negative comments:

*“Brexit has caused us to lose the best workers in hospitality (Interview No.18).*

*“Brexit has given us extra costs for custom declarations” (Interview No.6).*

However, some comments were positive about the impact of Brexit. This concurs with Scott and Bruce (1987) where positive behaviour in the entrepreneurial leader is a critical human value to diminish negativity and adversity and pursue business enterprise survival:

*“I’m sick and tired of people complaining about Brexit...if a business is not doing well, do something else or adapt your business, that is what I did” (Interview No.10).*

*“I know the messaging out there that Brexit is negative, but I actually think there is a real position of opportunity for Northern Ireland SMEs in the Brexit context” (Interview No.11).*

*Brexit has been good for my business and created opportunity (Interview No.3).*

Brown et al. (2020) completed longitudinal research into Scottish SMEs and concluded that certain types of SMEs (innovators and exporters) were disproportionately fearful of Brexit. Contrasting this with the local SMEs that did not export, were naturally not as concerned with Brexit. However, in the main, SMEs had to adjust to lead in a turbulent economic environment and maintain their business striving for profit focused survival and where possible contribute to social prosperity, known for this research as augmented SME growth.

Despite the apparent obstacles posed from Brexit and Covid19, these findings indicate that the SME entrepreneurial leaders endeavour to sustain their SME growth

economically whilst persevering to uphold their personal values and making some contribution to the generation of augmented SME growth. Many entrepreneurial leaders have specific measures to publish success in SME growth and a priority measurement is using economic instruments to demonstrate this. Measuring economic SME growth illustrates the entrepreneurial leader's contribution to economic growth, however there is no such measure for augmented SME growth. This highlights the lack measurement for the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

#### 6.9.4 Priority measures for economic SME growth; jobs, sales, and profit.

In examining the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth in economic terms (objective 1) suggests the priority measurements to be jobs, sales, and profit. These are indicators for SME growth in economic terms but not social terms. Nevertheless, this is a way of showing the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

The creation of jobs is an economic measure of growth used by both practitioners and academics even though growth of employment is never a singular goal in business growth (ONS, 2019). Increased activities in an SME however can lead to growth in employment, although a business can also grow by outsourcing, whereby sales may grow without any increase in costs. Furthermore, investment in technology or machinery can have a detrimental effect on employment growth as this can lead to employee redundancy. Job creation is used as a primary measure of growth by governments (Invest NI, 2021; ONS, 2019) although this has received scrutiny as the lead measurement of business growth by experts (Wiklund et al., 2009).

Renko et al. (2015 p.58) identified entrepreneurial leadership as:

*“Influencing and directing the performance of employees toward achieving those organisational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities”.*

The focus on job creation is also noted by Hermans et al. (2015) arguing that the entrepreneur's contribution to the economy through enterprise typically associates the entrepreneurial leader with a drive for sales, profit, and job creation. Indeed, job creation is the primary measure used by governments to determine SME growth in a region (ONS, 2019).

Regarding the importance of job creation as an important indicator of business growth, the research findings showed that the bigger the business the more important job creation is used as a metric to indicate SME growth. In addition, respondents were asked to rank from one to four what was the most and least important, type of SME growth metric in their SME. The growth metric with least importance to this sample of entrepreneurial leaders with regards to economic growth was job creation. Only 5% of respondents regarded job creation as an important metric regarding SME growth. This is an interesting finding considering job creation is the key metric used in government reports to measure SME growth.

SME entrepreneurial leaders' different responses to the rankings of business metrics was tested for significance. Sales showed no significance to business size and the same occurred for profit, both showing no significance in responses among the different sizes of SMEs led by entrepreneurial leaders. This indicates that amongst all sizes of businesses, profit and sales are in the top two rankings in a scale of 1-4 and usefully concurs with Herman's et al. (2015).

Regarding connecting with the community as a measure of business growth the findings showed there is a significant association between the size of business and their importance to connecting with the community. The results showed that even businesses with no employees in relation to those with 1-9 employees have similar rankings regarding the importance of connecting with the community as an indicator of business growth. Group 3 (10+) indicated that connecting with the community was least important metric to indicate business growth. This could be interpreted to mean that the larger the business the less likely they are, as an entrepreneurial leader, to see connecting with the community as a viable measure of SME growth. This concurs with Jenkins, (2004) in that larger SMEs are expected by government to account formally on their strategic social responsibility. This also contributes to larger businesses reputational risk and brand image so therefore engaging in wider societal



or regional 'greater good' activities and metrics is more important than connecting with their local community.

Regarding priority measures for SME growth, the interview responses from entrepreneurial leaders showed economic gain clearly as being important to entrepreneurial leaders:

*"Business growth means new business growth in sales and profit margins...turnover is vanity and profit is sanity, you know the old cliché". (Interview No.17).*

*"I have to make money financially in my business so that I can grow it and reinvest my profits to make it better and grow further" (Interview No.18).*

However, some entrepreneurial leaders indicated that it was not all about financial gain:

*"Financial goals are important metrics for my business...but a business is much more than pounds and pence" (Interview No.8).*

*"Growth for me is protecting our employees' mental health...their job is more than just a pay cheque" (Interview No.16).*

*"Softer values in business growth are important to me, it is not all about the money. So, we bring both those together" (Interview No.1).*

*"Business growth to me feels to be a bit more community focused" (Interview No.11).*

*"I think this collective approach has become much more important to me than business growth" (Interview No. 11).*

These results show that SME entrepreneurial leaders may have other reasons to start a business, beyond profit (Davidsson, 1989a; Delmar, 1996; Kolvereid, 1992; Storey, 1994). Nevertheless, whilst increased profitability can be the driver of some SMEs increasingly more of these businesses were more driven by value related factors (Douglas, 2013), like generating positive social aspects for their employees, community well-being and prosperity. This indicates that SME entrepreneurial leaders generate value beyond economic metrics, promoting augmented SME growth as a more holistic measure of SME growth (objective 2). Therefore, the contribution of

entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth would be measured more effectively, documenting their contribution to social wellbeing and prosperity in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

#### 6.9.5 Primary intentions enabling economic SME growth

Motivation for business growth is an important perspective within entrepreneurial leadership research as a psychological construct. This is because business growth is one of the key indicators of success in a small business and the entrepreneur reflects their effort and motivation to achieve success (Bhidé, 1999; Venkataraman, 1997; Davidsson et al., 2002). There has been extensive research into examining the positive connection between business growth and entrepreneurial motivation (Baum et al., 1998; Baum et al., 2001; Kolvereid and Bullvag, 1996; Miner et al., 1989).

Growth motivation is sometimes referred to as growth aspiration to extend the business through the subjective norms, choices, and efforts of the entrepreneur (Ajzen's 1991). Concurring with Ajzen (1991), the results showed that 95% of entrepreneurial leaders in the sample of NI SMEs intended to sustain and grow their business in the next three years. Steady growth was the most predominant intention of entrepreneurial leaders at 60% and if the rapid growth was considered in addition to steady growth the result rose to 76%. Indeed, Dutton (1993) asserts that an entrepreneurial leader's intentional behaviour is in some way informed by a perception that leads to action for business growth. This intention to grow a business is the motivation that can influence effort and willingness for business growth (Chan et al., 2006; Guieu and Guieu, 2014). Delmar and Wiklund (2008) and Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) contend that growth intention, aspirations and expectations can predict business growth, however these depend on two antecedents, namely perceived desirability, and feasibility of the growth. This corresponds with the literature where the entrepreneur's attitude to income (wealth), risk and decision-making autonomy (flexibility), work effort and enjoyment are ways of measuring perceived desire for business growth (McGee et al., 2009 and Chen et al., 1998; Gherhes et al., 2016).

However, the research also found that 5% of SME entrepreneurial leaders selected 'scaling back' their economic business growth as a primary intention. This finding accords with the literature that some businesses grow, and others do not (Anderson and Ullah., 2014; Audretsch et al., 2014; Gilbert et.al., 2006; McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010). Kelvie et al. (2017 p.273) argue that "it is the business leader's intention that will shape the direction, persistence and intensity of action for business growth". Therefore, it is the intention of the leader towards SME growth that indicates whether growth is slow, fast, or merely sustainable. Extensive research has however concluded that, in a significant number of enterprises, a lack of ambition is a constraint as many entrepreneurial leader's value non-economic impacts as a measure of success and are not necessarily driven by the financial imperatives (Gherhes et al., 2016). Therefore, the finding for this research that 5% of the SME entrepreneurial leaders intended to scale back their business for other value driven reasons advocates for a more socially responsible augmented SME growth metric.

#### 6.9.6 The meaning of business growth to entrepreneurial leaders

The discussion and evidence thus far illustrate that whilst the drive for economic financial success was an important motive to the entrepreneurial leaders, there are arguably deeper variables motivating the entrepreneurial leader in SME growth beyond commercial goals. Using the framework of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour, Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) completed a longitudinal study of 200 independent small businesses in Sweden over a period of 6 years. They found that SME entrepreneurial leader's aspirations to grow a business are positively related to business growth. Therefore, the individual, access to resources, their own experience and education do impact behavioural control toward opportunities that are of interest to their individual performance and subsequent intentional business outcomes. This view is captured in the citation below.

"Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how

much of an effort they are planning to exert in order to perform the behaviour. Generally, the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour, the more likely should be its performance”

(Ajzen, 1991 p.181).

Furthermore, Leitch and Volery (2017), purport the necessity to consider the cognitive, social impact and relationships developed in leading SMEs and measuring their contribution to an economy. More recently the emphasis has been focused on the collaborative behaviours of entrepreneurial leadership and its position in energising communities of practice that can co-create and collaborate beyond the organisational boundaries (Renko et al., 2015; Sklaveniti 2017; Romano et al., 2017).

When asked at interview ‘what does business growth mean to entrepreneurial leaders’ the responses below triggered deeper understanding of both their commercial and non-commercial intentions. Insights into understanding the meaning of business growth may show whether entrepreneurial leaders believe business growth is primarily for-profit maximisation in commercial NI SMEs. The responses below are wide and varied, though presented from the more commercial to the less commercial responses suggests the breadth of emerging social intentions of entrepreneurial leaders in NI SMEs:

Commercial growth intentions:

*“Primarily we try to grow the business through profit” (Interview No.8).*

*“I have to make money financially in my business so that I can grow it and reinvest my profits to make it better and grow further” (Interview No.18).*

*“So, business growth to me is simply maintaining my income...therefore growing my business financially year on year is really important to me” (Interview No.20).*

*“Business growth for me would be a percentage increase in sales” (Interview No.5).*

*“Growing a business year on year, so that it's sustainable, that is what is important in the first instance” (Interview No.6).*

It appears that these comments from SME entrepreneurial leaders agrees with the literature were Maki and Pukkinen (2000) and Gherhes et al. (2016) argue that SME growth is the pursuit of the owner manager to reach desired business outcomes. Perrin (1999 p.369) also accepts “financial success is vital in such small firms, being an essential growth driver”. However, in understanding the meaning of SME growth, it is important to consider the position that some SME businesses do not want to grow their business for fear of losing lifestyle benefits (Weber et al., 2015). Nevertheless, whilst increased profitability can be the driver of SMEs many more of these businesses are more driven by independence, increased leisure time, family flexibility objectives and personal job satisfaction (Douglas, 2013), these being more ‘value’ related factors that impact on societal prosperity and well-being. Welbourne et al. (2012) noted that while an entrepreneur may start a business their ambition may not be to grow the business because their choices included such reasons as, freedom to make own decisions, popularity, respect, flexibility and their own boss and these reasons could restrict growth (Holland and Shepherd, 2011). Moreover, Smith and Tang (2012) argue that being a small business can in fact be a huge advantage for an entrepreneurial leader, where intentions beyond economic drivers are important and suggest the increasing interest in more purposeful augmented SME growth. The comments below from the interviews also evidence the reasons why SMEs sustain their growth indicating the increasing importance of augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

Non-commercial growth intentions.

*“Softer values in business growth are important to me, not all about the money. So, we bring both those together” (Interview No.1)*

*“So, for me, life is about enjoying what you have now because your health is your wealth and you never know where you'll be...the world that we live in today, is totally broken, it's all about money, money, money (Interview No.10)*

*“Business growth to me feels a bit more community focussed” (Interview No.11)*

*“I think this collective approach has become much more important to me than business growth in my last company which was tech based with a focus on profit as business growth” (Interview No. 11).*

These findings correspond to the literature where entrepreneurs start and operate their own businesses for many reasons other than, or in addition to, maximising profit (Davidsson, 1989a; Delmar, 1996; Kolvereid, 1992; Storey, 1994). Douglas and Shepherd (2000) showed from their research that personal goals like independence and flexibility were stated as key reasons for starting and running a business and not entirely for financial reasons. Indeed, Saunders (2021 p.20) claims ‘the mood music is changing, and the pursuit of great wealth alone is no longer a socially acceptable ambition’. Moreover, the rising concept of Industry revolution 5.0 displays a growing interest in core values of human-centricity, sustainability and resilience and have become major driving forces for social growth instead of profit focused prosperity. Indeed, governments have been actively embedding these values in policy (Paris Agreement, 2015; SDGs 2015; Wellbeing of future generations, 2015; The economy of Wellbeing, Llena-Nozal, 2019; OECD Better Life Index, 2021; The Better Business Act, 2021). Furthermore, social values in the workplace like diversity, equality, and inclusivity (DEI) are also becoming increasingly important factors for entrepreneurial leaders (SDGs 2015).

Regarding the non-commercial growth intentions and employee development, in the literature Renko (2015) summarises how entrepreneurial leadership in business has been built on two pillars, firstly the attitudes of the leader as an individual and secondly the process of influence to motivate teams of people.

*“Growth is growing the team, its training people upskilling the staff that we have and growing a kind of a community within the team” (Interview No.13).*

*“Growth for me is developing my teams into leaders” (Interview No.6).*

*“Growth for me is protecting our employee’s mental health...their job is more than just a pay cheque” (Interview No.16).*

*“I always had a picture in my head of what successful business looks like...it was never about profit...it is not profit or people...it is profit and people” (Interview No.8).*

Whilst the meaning of business growth provided responses that referred to the means to make profit, grow and sustain employment, it was also notable that some responses clearly indicated that business growth for them meant ‘not growing’ their business. Anderson and Ullah (2014) identify this as a lack of intention to grow a business. They argue that small businesses purposively stay small for many reasons but mainly so that they do not have to employ more people.

It is interesting that the quantitative findings for this research somewhat agree with the literature and indicated that 5% of the entrepreneurial leaders surveyed wanted to scale down their business and 12% suggested in their responses that growing their business was unimportant to them. This was also echoed in the qualitative research findings.

*“I am not looking to grow my business; I do not set out to grow my business...what it means to me is bringing in enough money that it allows me to live for today” (Interview No.10).*

*“So, I don’t want to grow my business...I just want to sustain my business growth” (Interview No.4).*

In conclusion this section examined and discussed the empirical findings in understanding the intentions and decisions of entrepreneurial leaders in economic SME growth. It also shows the relationship between entrepreneurial leaders and SME growth in social and economic terms (objective 1) and attests the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth (objective 2) in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs. The discussion thus far has suggested the presence of an economically enabling entrepreneurial leader, however it also has revealed an emerging social conscience within entrepreneurial leadership. Recommendations for policy suggest a shift in mindset for policy makers to find ways that support both the generation of economic growth but also the generation of social growth. However, policy makers remain focused on using job creation, profit, sales, or other measurable indicators to generate economic growth. This leads to thinking around a more holistic understanding of what SME growth is and encourage further research (See section

7.5) into developing simple augmented SME growth social index indicators. Arguably an augmented SME growth measure beyond job creation, facilitated by government policy, could provide a more pragmatic, holistic, and future facing measure of augmented SME growth, given its potential impact on societal prosperity.

Underpinned by Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour the discussion signals the emergence of the socially enabling and responsible intentions within entrepreneurial leadership in conjunction with 'economically enabling' intentions. There is a lack of research on the social enabling intentions of commercial entrepreneurial leaders that limits current understanding of the entrepreneurial leadership theory for SME growth. Moreover, there appears to be a raised awareness of the significance of augmented SME growth and the subsequent implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory, policy, and practice (objective 3).

## 6.10 Theme C: The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth

### 6.10.1 Introduction

This research intends to contribute to the academic debate that entrepreneurial leaders enable and generate augmented SME growth and essentially provide holistically to local economic and social prosperity and wellbeing. Cohen (2020 p.24) refers to this as a growing form of "conscious capitalism...beyond profit...providing a more holistic picture of the true impact of business activities". Moreover, Mackey and Sisodia (2013 p.1) argue "Evidence is mounting that such businesses significantly outperform traditional businesses in financial terms, while also creating many other forms of well-being".

Davidsson and Wiklund (2000 p.50) concede that "entrepreneurial leadership research also takes an interest in value creation at a societal level, and this is a focus of research in entrepreneurial studies that has yet to be explored as sales alone are an inadequate measure (Penrose, 1959). The discussion thus far indicates that the combined social and commercial entrepreneurial leader have competing internal intentions in attaining positive local social impact in their communities. Tian and Smith



(2014) allude to the tension between social purpose and profit and how this conflict of interest can form a double-edged sword for social enterprises and SMEs. It is arguable that this contradiction of mission suggests more of a struggle for the social entrepreneurial leaders prioritising social value as opposed to an entrepreneurial leader who is traditionally more driven toward generating economic value. Interviews with entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs signalled a continued priority for economic SME growth over social growth:

*“As long as we have the financial security only then we could do more of this pro-bono work” (Interview No.7).*

*“Once I get to a sufficient income level that I have in my head... I'm happy to do those sorts of things. But until I get there, I'm going to be doing none of those things” (Interview No.9).*

Consequently, the importance of enabling economic SME growth by entrepreneurial leaders is well established. However, this empirical research suggests that the importance of enabling social growth and value in a community was an emerging theme in the current SME growth environment (objective 2 and 3).

#### 6.10.2 The importance of enabling social SME growth

There is much to learn from social entrepreneurial leadership when discussing the importance of enabling social growth in an SME. Scholars have defined the social enterprise to create social value (Quandt et al., 2017; Henry, 2012) and finding a sustainable balance between the social and commercial aspects of social entrepreneurship (Ridley-Duff and Bull, 20; Chell et al., 2016; Hynes, 2009). Social enterprises therefore have a social purpose where profit is not their primary objective as they are not owned by shareholders. SME growth in a social enterprise is typically measured in social profit as opposed to financial profit which is the preferred growth outcome of a commercial business. A priority for social enterprises is a robust stakeholder relationship (Owen et al, 2001) that withdraws an amount of control from the social entrepreneurial leader in decision making and transfers this to the stakeholders building social capital during the process. Social capital is the capability of individuals to work toward a common purpose (Fukuyama,1995) and incorporates

elements that are of value to communities and provide a collective feel-good factor (Henry, 2012). Therefore, social enterprises have a social conscience that is mirrored in how they engage with their stakeholders, and this holds tremendous promise for improving social well-being. Indeed, social outcomes for a community provide wider gains for social cohesion, community integration, prosperity, and well-being (Chell et al., 2016). This aligns to the literature by Cabrita and Vaz, (2008) who suggest that customer and community relationships generate a bond that creates value in the business and establishes sustainable relationships that will encourage partnerships beyond the scope of the SME. Furthermore, Pinho and Prange (2016) claim that a business knowledge base can be significantly augmented through building relational networks that can create extraordinary capabilities toward better performing SMEs from a socio-economic lens.

It was interesting in the findings that less than half of entrepreneurial leaders indicated that enabling social impact was important. When asked to select from various options of community activities that they would engage in 49% selected supporting young enterprise initiatives followed closely by attending local B2B events by 48% of SMEs. Jenkins (2006) claims that many companies were somewhat cynical of being asked to demonstrate their social responsibility credentials by customer companies and this suggests a 'box ticking' approach. Therefore, in agreement with Jenkins (2006) it appears that entrepreneurial leaders are not fully convinced about engaging in social value activities and the potential advantages from these activities (Cochius, 2006). Maybe, there is a lack of understanding around the reciprocal benefits of engaging in socially responsible activities for SMEs.

The relationship between size of business and engaging in community activities was explored. Results showed this was only significant in educational placements where entrepreneurial leaders with no employees said it was not important to engage in educational placements however 75% of entrepreneurial leaders of larger SMEs (10+) said it was extremely important. This is aligned to the structures in place in larger SMEs to accommodate educational placements.

The qualitative comments from the interviews with entrepreneurial leaders did demonstrate a reluctance to get involved in non-commercial activities and generate social value:

*“I do get asked to sit in different boards and do different things and I generally will just say no because I'm busy with these other things in the business”*  
(Interview No.20)

*“No, I purposely don't get involved in non-commercial activities (Interview No.1)*

*And it's hard to especially when you're trying to get the business into an even keel to have time to think of those other things” (Interview No.6).*

This shows that there seems to be a ‘tipping point’ economic level for each SME entrepreneurial leader that must be reached before their intentions shift to become involved in the social growth activities of their SME. This is not supported in the literature but a surprising finding for this research encouraging debate in the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth.

### 6.10.3 Community activities and enabling social SME growth

Thompson's research (2002) identified four central themes on the scope of social activities that social entrepreneurial leaders may use to create social value in a community. These are job creation, utilisation of buildings, volunteer support and a ‘catch all’ of generally helping people in ways that can be measured. The empirical data identified a plethora of activities undertaken by entrepreneurial leaders and cumulatively the 204 entrepreneurial leaders highlighted 510 activities that their business engaged in to create social value. On average entrepreneurial leaders contributed to 2.5 social activities annually whilst running their business.

The qualitative research underpinned a sense of commitment to social value generation by entrepreneurial leaders of NI SMEs. The question asked was to determine their intentions to engage in ‘non-commercial’ activity to create community social value. Out of 20 interviews there were numerous references to non-commercial activities which entrepreneurial leaders intentionally engaged in within their

communities. The selection of comments below illustrates the intentions and emerging social conscience within commercial entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs:

*“A lot of the non-commercial work we do is terribly rewarding” (Interview No.13).*

*“It was always my vision from day one...if you own a business...you are privileged to give back to the wider community as a whole and make that part of the decisions that you make” (Interview No.15).*

*“I suppose it is not all about making money there are other important things to help the community like the charity fundraisers we do” (Interview No.18).*

*“The community is the heartbeat of our village and our business is too” (Interview No.2).*

*“From when I was young people helped me out pro-bono and now I kinda’ want to do the same” (Interview No.9).*

Some specific examples of activities that generate social value were given:

*“We ran our cafes for a day just before Christmas and give all our proceeds to Marie Curie. So, we raised about eleven thousand pound for that and to be honest, it's more about giving back and it's not just about money” (Interview No.15).*

*“We do some coffee mornings for Macmillan” (Interview No. 2).*

*“The hero shield project where we designed PPE and a local manufacturing company made the Hero Shield during Covid for the NHS,” (Interview No.13).*

*“We gave the students the venue free” (Interview No.18).*

The qualitative analysis gave deeper insight into the discussion on specific types of activities generated by NI SMEs, depending on the entrepreneurial leaders' intentions and SME model. Overall, the evidence suggests that entrepreneurial leaders did engage in community activities galvanising reciprocal relationships and subsequently contributing to community prosperity. This aligns to Rae (2017) who asserts that social enabling is a strategic approach to generating positive socio-economic change by linking local stakeholders including the market, local business, the employed, unemployed, volunteers, families, schools and wider communities and society.

Further to this Lyons et al. (2012) found in their research that co-creation of social growth between active community leaders and local SME entrepreneurs with a social ethos, can purposively create social growth around projects that positively impacts employees and therefore community prosperity and well-being. These cultivated community relationships demonstrate the importance of defining value in promoting community social, cultural, and economic cohesion (Markley et al., 2015).

#### 6.10.4 Community relations and enabling social SME growth

Radulovich et al. (2018) posits that for SMEs to grow, the key integral resources are human capital, structural capital, and relational capital as SMEs with entrepreneurial leaders have a unique ability to access external knowledge and create value in a business using these resources. For the purposes of this research the relational capital refers to the deep engagement and positive results generated between two parties (Dyer and Singh, 1998) those being the entrepreneurial leader and the SMEs internal and external stakeholders. This is demonstrated in the investment in time or knowledge into these relationships (Davidsson and Honig, 2003). Accordingly, relational capital seizes the worth of business relationships with the community, customers and employees and is a deeply valuable resource to sustain a business. Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) also argue that an SME entrepreneurial leader provides the capabilities, through broad social networks, to better utilise limited resources and reach resources from external groups. Radulovich (2019 p.128) claims “Entrepreneurial Leadership influences business performance by orchestrating the deployment of intellectual relational assets, which, in turn, results in new reconfigurations of service”.

The findings found that 66% of entrepreneurial leaders thought it was important to have a good relationship with their community and associated businesses. Further to this 49% of SME entrepreneurial leaders indicated it was important to embed their SME in local community development. This suggests that SME entrepreneurial leaders are open to building relationships with local stakeholders and aligned to the behaviour of social enterprises. Concurring with Owen et al. (2001) this research finds that stakeholder relationships are important in creating a common purpose

(Fukuyama,1995) and incorporates elements that are of value to communities and provide a collective 'feel good factor'.

The potential relationship between size of business and importance of building reciprocal relationships was tested and the results showed there was no significant association between the size of business and the entrepreneurial leader's intention to build community relationships. Therefore, community relationships were an important element in all sizes of SMEs. This accords with Tan and Meyer (2010) who argue that community networks help to tackle obstacles through partnership and reciprocal interdependencies that build relational resources to sustain SME growth in a local business environment. Lee et al. (2001) assert that entrepreneurial leaders seek valuable economic opportunities through partnering the resource within their community networks.

The qualitative data collected from participant responses also showed the intention to reach out and sustain reciprocal relationships with the community as a factor in SME social growth:

*"It is really about relationships in the world of business" (Interview No.5)*

*"Yes, I think relationships are really important, a good example is where my landlord would lend me their big Korean digger to a job in this building...I help him out with his logistics" (Interview No.6).*

*"It was a huge collaborative project with lots of local companies. A lot of companies give their time for free" (Interview No.13).*

Overall, the data signalled building relationships with the local community was important to some extent to entrepreneurial leaders in a growing SME. This importance informs intentions and behaviours suggesting a social enabling style within SME entrepreneurial leadership and the generation of augmented growth (objective 3).

#### 6.10.5 Social responsibility and enabling social SME growth

Having discussed the primary mission of a social entrepreneur to generate social value through social enterprise, the empirical results showed that a sense of social value

was also generated in commercial enterprises by entrepreneurial leaders. Santos (2009) highlights the differentiation between social enterprises generating social growth as their primary aim and commercial businesses who appropriate value to social creation through financial means through socially responsible activities, sometimes referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The concept of CSR has been defined by the European Commission (2011 p.1) as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” and recommends collaborative processes with stakeholders to integrate social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns into their business model. The European Commission considers CSR to be the responsibility of commercial businesses typically housed in the ‘corporate sector’, however the word ‘corporate’ associates this with large companies. Southwell (2004) claims consensus in the literature that ‘CSR’ is not the most appropriate term to reflect an SMEs engagement in community, environmental and social issues. Indeed, CSR in many SMEs remains ‘hidden’ as it is often an informal process and they do not have the resource to monitor and report on such. Interestingly, in the last decade there has been an increasing significance of CSR for the SME sector particularly in social and environmental impacts (Puiu and Wiśniewski, 2020). More recently, the environmental criteria in Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) pertain to the key elements around ‘green’ issues and can be a useful compass for SMEs.

The quantitative survey data tested if size of business made any difference to socially responsible commitments. The data showed that whilst different SME sizes engaged in the various socially responsible activities, all business sizes demonstrated commitment. Further to this, the survey data revealed that regarding embedding sustainability, almost four in five (79%) of entrepreneurial leaders indicated that ethical standards and practices in their supply chain were important for sustainability and 76% indicated that efficiency/lean methods as important. Optimising energy usage scored 72% in importance regarding embedding sustainability in their SME.

These findings agree with the research by Morsing and Perrini (2009 p.2) who stridently claim that “SMEs are motivated, challenged and engaged in social responsibility issues in many and very different ways compared with large firms”. Despite this, individual SME businesses receive little recognition for CSR (Spence et

al., 2003), notwithstanding their dominance (99.9%) of all UK business enterprises that collectively generate essential social and environmental impact for an economy (Hammann et al., 2009).

The potential relationship between size of business and sustainability showed that the Efficiency/Lean improvement processes by entrepreneurial leaders in SME businesses was identified as important. However, it was less important for the 'no employees' category as particularly this group were possibly not property based. Nevertheless, the data suggests, regardless of size of SME, efficiency/lean practices are deemed 'important' and indicative of a 'socially enabling' entrepreneurial leader.

Qualitative responses indicated at a deeper level that entrepreneurial leaders were responding to the 'green agenda' toward embedding sustainability practices in their SME. Out of the 20 interviews conducted, 10 of the entrepreneurial leaders spoke positively of the importance of sustainability and the green agenda:

*“And I'm a kind of eco warrior guy, we print virtually zero, my next car will be an electric car. We recycle everything. And we support several businesses who engage in sustainability processes” (Interview No.1).*

*“... the environment is a really important thing and there is a growing consciousness that we need to do more to help our grandchildren as folks” (Interview No.12).*

*“...it's something that consumers expect now and it's something that we feel very strongly about” (Interview No.13).*

*“We're big time into recycling we have separate bins for cardboard, plastic, and all our bottles. We always use energy efficiency and use LED lights that we changed completed just two years ago” (Interview No.17).*

These comments indicate that SME entrepreneurial leaders consider the environmental impact of their SME to be important but not something they measure. To support this view, a study by Balluchi and Furlotti (2013) revealed that many SMEs are unaware of the environmental impact they have on the community. Indeed, their research revealed that 49% of SMEs believe they do not implement any environmental initiatives and 89% believe they do not support socially responsible activities. The entrepreneurial leader interview responses below mirrored these findings:



*“It is not one of my top 2 priorities...I'm buying a new one of the new electric cars, I never bought it for environmental reasons... I bought it for tax reasons” (Interview No.10).*

*“It's not something that forms a big part of our thinking...it doesn't align to supporting high growth tech start-ups” (Interview No.11).*

*“No, I am not big into the green agenda...I am terrible for printing out material” (Interview No.3).*

Another study conducted by Puiu and Wiśniewski (2020) discovered that the reason why SMEs did not engage in CSR was because they believed that there was no demand in the community. Connecting to research by Yu (2010) in SMEs in Sweden who identified the reason SMEs did not to engage in CSR was a combination of human and financial resource constraints and minor positive impact reported by stakeholders in the community.

Maybe, it is the case however that entrepreneurial leaders do not always 'know' when they are embedding sustainability in their SME. This notion is supported by Knopf and Mayer-Scholl, (2013) who concluded that one of the challenges of SMEs is that their CSR function can be hidden under different functions and therefore difficult to identify and measure. Whether embedding sustainability is hidden or not, the empirical evidence and literature both indicate sufficiently the existence of the socially enabling entrepreneurial leaders, however measuring social value is almost impossible and therefore largely probably remains unmeasured in SMEs. Hence, research to reveal the hidden social contribution of SME entrepreneurial leaders would illuminate the generation of augmented SME growth.

#### 6.10.6 Measuring social SME growth

Investors, funders, and policy makers are attracted to businesses that utilise their resources efficiently and effectively enabling foresight for socio-economic return (Lyon and Owen, 2019). In commercial SME businesses, success is measured by capturing the value created by product and services (Mongelli and Rullani, 2017) around the architecture of revenues, costs and profits associated with the delivery of economic

value (Foss and Saebi, 2017). However, despite this enthusiasm, measuring the hidden social impact of a commercial business is troublesome for policy makers and accountants as they cannot agree on what it is or how to assess it.

Over the last 40 years there have been attempts from many sources to calculate social value (Mulgan, 2010). This has led to fragmented and ambiguous literature demonstrating the frustrations of measuring social impact from either social or commercial enterprises. Whilst numerous definitions of social impact measures have been attempted no universally accepted definition has been agreed (Mulgan, 2010; Costa and Pesci, 2016; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie, 2016). Given the current complexity in attempting to select the best method to measure social value or growth explains why such controversy exists in the field (Maas and Liket, 2011; Perrini and Vurro, 2013; Bengo et al.,2015) and that a “golden standard” applicable to all social enterprises is largely inconceivable (Costa and Pesci, 2016). When asked about gathering data for business performance measurement purposes 85% of entrepreneurial leaders collected customer feedback. Regarding collecting data on community engagement as a success measure 49% said they did not collect this data, 29% indicated they did and 22% responded that it was not applicable. Arguably, 71% of these SME entrepreneurial leaders do not see the value in collecting social impact data, do not know how to collect it, or do not see any merit in collecting such.

The importance of collecting data to inform decisions was tested between the different SME sizes. The association between size of business and data collection for decision making was explored and revealed that the larger the SME the more likely it was to gather non-financial social impact data. Measuring social impact in smaller SMEs is clearly challenging and concurs with Mulgan (2010) that there is a lack of measures or calculations of social impact. Indeed, there is no unified measure of social impact. Consequently, this means the contribution to local community prosperity remains unmeasured (Mulgan, 2010; Costa and Pesci, 2016; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie, 2016), because complexity and controversy reigns (Maas and Liket, 2011; Perrini and Vurro, 2013; Bengo et al.,2015). Consequently, policy makers cannot agree on what it is or how to assess it. Embracing this confusion is central to enabling a new approach or measure of business growth beyond financial outputs.

Having interviewed 20 participants it was clear that measuring social impact was not something that many of the entrepreneurial leaders saw as a valuable task in their SME growth. Evidence of this was indicated in that only 1 interviewee said they measured the time spent on pro-bono consultancy:

*“Yes, I measure it in time, I keep my timesheets very tight as do a lot of consultants, so half day or full day and I could manage it on my electronic diary” (Interview No.3).*

Only one other business measured their social impact and that was attached to environmental reasons to win a business award.

*“We measured it to get awards. So, we did that on two different occasions. So not like measuring money, but environmental targets are a type of money because they are valuable if you are trying to measure them for awards” (Interview No.2).*

The remaining 18 interviews all said they did not measure social growth and below shows some examples of the participant responses:

*“No, I don’t. I just give the time required to fulfil my pro-bono work” (Interview No.12).*

*“No, it’s not something we measure” (Interview No.13).*

*“No... I’ve never done that... measure the time I spend doing good” (Interview No.6).*

*“I do not record it anywhere formally...I would need to figure it out at the end of each year” (Interview No.5)*

*“No, I don’t... though I think it should be. It’s something I always want to do, and I enjoy it. I think the government should take into consideration that businesses that are doing well are growing and giving to the community should have an incentive for pro bono guidance and help” (Interview No. 9).*

Given the challenge of finding a measure of social growth clearly ‘one size does not fit all’ (Grieco, 2015). Perrini et al. (2021) suggests that measuring social growth is effective when it is simple, useful, certain, natural, understood, accepted, transparent and evidence based. Furthermore, the evaluation of social growth within SMEs

deserves greater attention as otherwise the real impact on community prosperity is lost (Perrini et al., 2021). These findings suggest that whilst social value is generated in SMEs it remains unmeasured by entrepreneurial leaders and subsequently the significant contribution to community prosperity hidden. Arguably, this denotes the hidden contribution of entrepreneurial leaderships generation of the social element of augmented SME growth (objective 2 and 3).

Indeed, the messages from the global socio-economic environment are clear, business strategies must include environmental and social factors grounded in good governance (Fenwick et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is little or no discussion about environmental and social governance (ESG) strategies or reporting for SMEs and how these could support them to do business and survive in a disruptive yet socially conscious and relevant business world. A further innovation in recognising and measuring social SME growth is through the Certified B Corporations (B Corps) movement. The B Corps brand was established because of the increasing requirement of SMEs to report on social and environmental performance to overcome a growing mistrust in capitalism (Deloitte 2020; Hanbury Strategy, 2020) and tackle negative environmental and social issues (Conger et al., 2018). Despite the innovative reporting approach of B Corps and ESGs, measuring social growth has always been a challenge for both commercial and social SMEs as it appears to be easy to identify but measurement continues to be challenging. Moreover, the thrust of the Sustainable Development Goals (2030) and the Better Business Act (2021) may incentivise entrepreneurial leaders to measure and report on socially responsible SME growth (Stubbs, 2017; Carvalho et al., 2022; Deloitte, 2020). This shift towards measurement of social growth is aligned with the findings of this research. Subsequently, whilst Theme C highlights the importance of environmental and social impact to SME entrepreneurial leaders, their contribution to generating augmented SME growth remains hidden. Therefore, the apparent challenge is finding a practicable means to measure the social value contributed by SME entrepreneurial leaders generating augmented SME growth (objective 4).

The discussion leads to what implications this may have for governments to implement policy around the design and inclusion of innovative metrics that could incentivise an SMEs augmented contribution. The discussion however must be mindful of the 'tipping point' for entrepreneurial leaders' economic level where economic safety must be

reached before social value activities will be considered as a form of SME growth. A further key consideration in policy design generated from the research findings is that there are no stifling compliance measures associated with SME growth policy. Imposing fines to SMEs for not meeting environmental targets or not contributing to local community initiatives would be unhelpful for SMEs when the 'economy safety' is sometimes compromised by changes in the macro environment. Indeed, what is required is a change in culture in policy and practice toward environmental and sustainability processes as SMEs endeavour to generate augmented SME growth.

In summary, Theme C findings indicated the importance of the entrepreneurial leadership contribution to augmented SME growth through supporting community activities and socially responsible SME growth mindful of the desire for economic safety (objective 2 and 3).

## 6.11 Theme D: The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth through employees

### 6.11.1 Introduction

Theme D, emerged from the literature and the subsequent quantitative survey data, and qualitative interviews, focusing on evidencing how entrepreneurial leaders enable social growth through employees (objective 1). The quantitative survey had 160 (78%) responses from entrepreneurial leaders with employees and from the 20 interviews conducted there were 11 (55%) businesses with employees. Enabling social growth through employee engagement is important as the research showed how entrepreneurial leaders generate augmented SME growth through the relationships with their employees (objective 2). Supporting employee well-being and development suggests a contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

Stoian and Gilman (2017) reveal from their research that social responsibility brings benefit directly related to the community such as creating jobs for residents, supporting employee giving, employee volunteering and philanthropic activities. Indeed, the BIS (2010) identified SME activities that generate social growth is where an employer

supports employee giving and volunteering, sound staff recruitment, staff development, upholding work-life balance, wellbeing, and a culture of trust (Sarmawa et al., 2020; Yanik, 2018). Additional activities identified are where employers provide fair and equitable wage and implement non-discriminatory practices. This concurs with scholarly research by McNeff and Irving (2017) and Farrington and Lillah (2019) on the relevance of employee satisfaction in SMEs.

#### 6.11.2 Engaging employees in the community and enabling social SME growth

Radulovich et al. (2018) postulates that for businesses to grow the key integral resources are human capital, structural capital, and relational capital. For the purposes of this research relational capital refers to the deep engagement and positive results generated between two parties (Dyer and Singh, 1998) those being the entrepreneurial leader and the SMEs internal (employees) and external stakeholders (community). Accordingly, relational capital seizes the worth of business relationships with the community, customers and employees and is a deeply valuable resource to sustain an SME.

Responses from those entrepreneurial leaders with employees showed that only 38% of the entrepreneurial leaders thought it was important to engage their employees in community development and local fundraisers. Indeed 29% of the entrepreneurial leaders rated this as unimportant. Community engagement in fundraisers seemed to be something that employers did not feel was important in their SME social growth intentions. This is contrary to Tan and Meyer's (2010) research that claims community networks help to tackle obstacles through partnership and reciprocal interdependencies.

The qualitative interviews explored the engagement of employees in non-commercial activities further. From the 11 participants there were significant references to employee engagement in non-commercial activities and a sample of the positive responses to this are below:

*"I feel it is important to give our employees time to do their own extracurricular charitable work" (Interview No.1).*

*“I think people need to do non-commercial activities if nothing else it helps their frame of thinking and how to do their job” (Interview No.11).*

*“I have a very positive view of this because volunteering concerns their self-esteem and their sense of self” (Interview No. 2).*

It appears therefore that there is some disparity between this and the survey results that identified only 38% of entrepreneurial leaders encouraged community development activities. There is a sense that entrepreneurial leaders encouraged engagement on non-commercial activity providing it was an employee’s own time and not during work time:

*“One of our senior managers wanted to go on a mission trip to Africa, she had no annual leave left. So, I said, no problem. If you want to take unpaid leave and do it that is grand” (Interview No.8).*

It appears then that whilst SME entrepreneurial leaders valued community development activities and encouraged their employees to do so, it seemed only acceptable as an unpaid activity.

### 6.11.3 Employee wellbeing and enabling social SME growth

Entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs with employees indicated that whilst work life balance and wellbeing was important to them as an individual, they also valued it for their employees, with 95% rating it as important. From the 11 entrepreneurial leaders who were interviewed and had employees the comments below show this commitment to employee well-being:

*“I feel very responsible for my employee wellbeing” (Interview No.11).*

*“Employee wellbeing is seriously important. It's massive. In this industry especially because it is quite stressful” (Interview No.17).*

These findings concur with the literature and Douglas (2013) argues that some SMEs are more driven by value related factors, like generating positive social aspects for their employee well-being and prosperity. Intentions to grow an SME mindful of employee wellbeing is a motivation that informs intention and subsequent behaviour to action. From a wider community well-being aspect inclusive of employees, Chell et al. (2016) advocate that social outcomes for a community provide wider gains for social cohesion, community integration, prosperity, and well-being.

The interviews with SME entrepreneurial leaders attracted numerous references to employee wellbeing:

*“Prioritising their wellbeing means prioritising their work life balance. To be fair, you get back in abundance from staff when you are mindful of their wellbeing”*  
(Interview No.15).

*“Their well-being is so important to me. The mental health of my staff is vitally important. My managers are interested...and they don't think it's trivial”*  
(Interview No.16).

*“It is very important, I think, more than ever with coming out of Covid it is going to be critical. Young people are sometimes good at masking their well-being*  
(Interview No.18).

The research also found that 79% of entrepreneurial leaders ranked well-being activities for the employees as important and this is supported in the literature by Sharif and Scandura (2014). Therefore, it appears that the SME entrepreneurial leaders understood the importance of being accountable for their employee wellbeing. However, operationalising their intentions was less clear, when the research indicated engaging employees in wellbeing activities only 38% of entrepreneurial leaders provide support for employees to become engaged in community activities. This suggests that while wellbeing of employees is important to entrepreneurial leaders, it is not something they feel accountable for in facilitating paid time for employees to engage in such activities. Moreover, this also denotes that SME entrepreneurial



leaders' approach to structured wellbeing activities is less strategic and a more spontaneous activity.

The literature is not necessarily aligned to these research findings where Lyons et al. (2012) found in their research, examples of co-creation of social growth between active community leaders and local commercial entrepreneurs. Lyons et al. (2012) research findings concluded that the entrepreneurial leader with a social ethos will purposively endeavour to create social growth around projects that positively impact their employees. Further to this, Agote et al. (2015) in the leadership literature argues that authentic leadership can demonstrate an ability to process the inherent conflicts of commercial and social profitability using a win-win approach to gain an optimum resolve for themselves and their collectives in a sincere and transparent manner. There have also been studies on the positive impact of servant leadership on follower well-being that enhance job satisfaction, work family commitment (Tang et al., 2016) and life satisfaction. Perhaps raising awareness of the benefits of engaging employee in community activities would help SME entrepreneurial to understand the positives for employee wellbeing and consider these activities more strategically (objective 4).

#### 6.11.4 Employee development and enabling social SME growth

Hazlehurst (2021 p.47) argues that "a servant leader ensures that others highest priority needs are met, so they grow as persons and become healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous". Arguably, employee development is this form of social growth within an SME enabled by the entrepreneurial leader. Pinho and Prange (2016) claim that an SMEs human resources knowledge base can be significantly augmented through building relational networks that can create extraordinary capabilities toward better performing SMEs from a socio-economic lens. There have also been studies on the positive impact of servant leadership on commitment to the development of followers (Spears, 2010; VanDerdonck 2010).

From the research survey, developing the skills and knowledge of employees was the second highest activity that the entrepreneurial leaders engaged in regarding social growth, with 89% of respondents agreeing it was important. Further analysis found no

significance between the size of business and the entrepreneurial leader's intention to secure social growth through developing their employees. This signals a unity of feeling around the importance of socially growing your business through developing your employees' professional skills.

The qualitative responses by entrepreneurial leaders also showed commitment to employee development:

*"I'll always make sure that I've got a longer-term plan for everyone's professional development" (Interview No.11).*

*"We regularly have a sit down with each individual team member and we'll review their KPIs and consider their own development (Interview No.13).*

*"I always ask my staff on an annual basis, where do you want development? (Interview No.18).*

Consequently, the evidence indicates that an entrepreneurial leader's intention to professionally develop and skill up their employees, is a significant factor in generating social growth within their SME (objective 3).

#### 6.11.5 Employee appraisal and enabling social SME growth

Sarmawa et al. (2020) study noted that integrating ethical behaviour with entrepreneurial leadership can significantly sustain and advance business performance. The study evidenced the importance of employee trust (Yanik, 2018) and the ethical SME entrepreneurial leader to secure sustained business growth (Yu et al., 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2017). According to Brown et al. (2006 p.597) ethical leadership is defined as "the display of a leader's proactive explicit role to influence employee performance (Copeland, 2014) and build reciprocal trust in a business" (Eisenbeiss and Giessber, 2012). Arguably, appraisal systems for employees in an SME are a mechanism to display reciprocal trust and commitment by the entrepreneurial leader.

The quantitative survey concurred with the literature as 68% of entrepreneurial leaders with employees said that an employee appraisal process was important with regards to SME growth (objective 2). This indicates a positive intention to appraise and invest in employees to help stimulate social growth over the next three years. This research therefore corroborates a sense of intention for SME entrepreneurial leaders to engage employees and develop their employee capability using good appraisal practices (objective 3). In this case there was a significance between the business size and the use of an employee appraisal process concluding that employee appraisals were more likely to be used in larger SMEs.

The qualitative results showed enthusiasm for employee appraisals by entrepreneurial leaders:

*We regularly sit down with each individual team member and review their KPIs, and part of the review is also their own development. So, we look at kind of where they are in their training. If there are any gaps” (Interview No.13).*

*“It is an important part of the professional growth of the management team” (Interview No.16).*

The research indicates therefore, that entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs value the importance of employee appraisal mechanisms (Copeland, 2014) however, only if they embrace the mechanism holistically will social impact through their employees be realised (objective 3).

#### 6.11.6 Employee voice and enabling social SME growth

Relational capital refers to the deep engagement and positive results generated between two parties those being the entrepreneurial leader and their employees (Dyer and Singh, 1998). Carter and Baghurst (2014) endorse the importance of employee engagement by servant leaders. They argue that since employees are viewed as one of the greatest assets for growing SMEs, maintaining loyal, productive employees while balancing profits is a challenge to be overcome by entrepreneurial leaders. Cable (2019 p.10) purports, that “employees whose seeking system is activated, can bring their best selves to work”.

Employees having a say in the business was selected as important by 76% of the SME entrepreneurial leaders (objective 1 and 2). This suggests a desire for employee engagement by listening to the employee voice and cementing relational capital to collectively reach business goals (objective 3). Further analysis showed no significant association in business size and employees having a say in the business. This suggests that some intention to listen to the employee voice exists within entrepreneurial leaders regardless of the size of the SME.

The qualitative interviews in contrast intimated that the employee voice was important but ultimately the entrepreneurial leader had the final say in decision making:

*“I very much dictate the direction of growth of the business. I do always take the team’s views on board though. If I’m honest, when it comes to growth of the business, that’s very much my direction and decisions” (Interview No.15).*

*“I certainly support employees making suggestions but ultimately the decisions will be made between my business partner and myself” (Interview No.9).*

Conclusively, if employees are perceived by entrepreneurial leaders as one of the greatest assets for growing an SME, there is always the challenge of maintaining collective employee loyalty while balancing profits. Indeed, Hazlehurst (2021, p.49) concludes “...this is because the capitalist system rewards individual output and there is no incentive for collectivism”. Hence, in considering social growth authentically, accepting some contribution from employee’s voice is perceived to be important to SME entrepreneurial leaders. However, in practice, as the findings suggest, whilst SME entrepreneurial leaders agreed the employee voice was important, in practice the final decision was the remit of the SME owner. Overall, the research from Theme D reveals to some extent, SME entrepreneurial leaders enabled social growth through their employees (objective 2 and 3).

## 6.12 Entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth

Currently both academic and business research focuses SME growth primarily on measurable economic metrics and various ways to operationalise this as an entrepreneurial leader (Ipinnaiye et al., 2017; Siddiqui and Jan 2017; ONS 2019).

Furthermore, scholars of entrepreneurial leadership have continually evidenced that profit maximization is a widespread measure of SME growth and success (Yazdanfar and Ohman, 2018; Harrison and Leitch, 2018; Ng and Kee, 2018; Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Hermans et al., 2015; ONS, 2019). Increasingly however a rising social consciousness in the business environment is influencing entrepreneurial leaders to identify and exploit opportunities beyond economic outputs. This research evidence suggests entrepreneurial leadership also values internal and external stakeholder relationships for their social SME growth in addition to economic SME growth.

In summary, the discussion has systematically triangulated and integrated the qualitative and quantitative findings guided by the conceptual framework emerging from the literature review in Chapter 2 (Figure 1.0). Building on the original conceptual framework, Figure 6.1 below illustrates a further developed conceptual framework following this chapter's discussion pathway. The discussion began on entrepreneurial leadership work lifestyle values informing intentions in Theme A, then going on to discuss and triangulate the findings on entrepreneurial leadership enabling economic growth in the top path through Theme B. The bottom pathway discussed and triangulated the findings on socially enabled entrepreneurial leadership Theme C, and with employees Theme D. Compounding the four themed pathways, guided by the conceptual framework, have led to a deeper understanding and explanation of how entrepreneurial leadership contributes to augmented SME growth (objective 2 and 3).

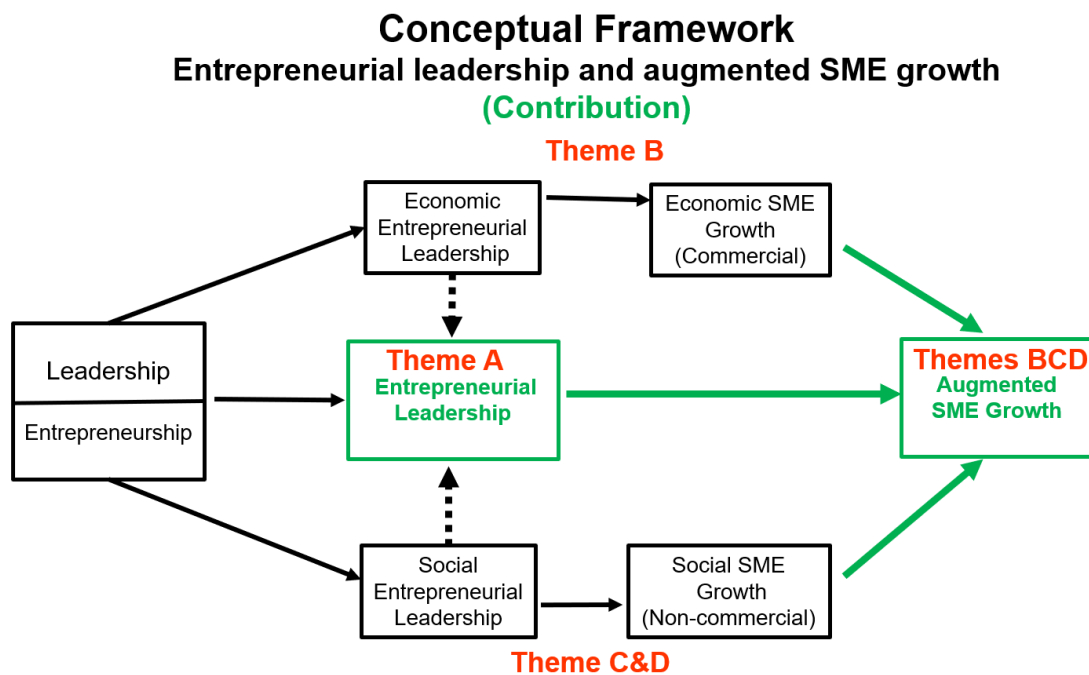


Figure 6.1 Conceptual framework for entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth aligned to themes A-D

The discussion thus far, argues that SME profit maximization alone is an increasingly insufficient measure of entrepreneurial leadership. Arguably therefore, augmented SME growth is a more relevant measure given the rising social conscience of many entrepreneurial leaders (objective 3). Atkinson (2021 p.72) claims “over the next 10 years, business needs to think about success in a more balanced way where the orientation is serving multiple stakeholders as opposed to shareholders”.

SME growth is pivotal on the decisions inspired by their leaders and this research challenges the popular economic measurements of SME growth, arguing that ‘emerging’ entrepreneurial leadership exploits opportunity for ‘augmented’ SME growth (objective 3). Atkinson (2021) purports “The future is a world where the contribution a business makes to society and its impact on the planet is seen as being as valuable as its financial performance”. Consequently, this thesis also argues, based on the findings, that augmented SME growth contributes at a richer level, to the economic and social fabric of local community prosperity and societal wellbeing. Therefore, the theory of entrepreneurial leadership can be modified, to incorporate a more holistic definition by including greater understanding of established seminal ‘socially enabling’ leadership theories like servant, ethical and authentic leadership. In

modifying the theory, the empirical evidence suggests entrepreneurial leadership can purposively enable augmented SME growth in NI SMEs.

This research can inform future considerations to challenge policy and academic measurements for SME growth, connecting the focus of the 'nuanced' entrepreneurial leader to wider economic and socially enabling indicators. One outcome of this research is to illustrate to policy makers that richer indicators of growth beyond job creation could be used to evaluate and report on the impact of SMEs to a nation's socio-economic development (objective 4). Indeed, a focus of research into small businesses that shows the positive impact of 'softer growth indicators' (societal) could be paramount in sustaining a nation's economy in the longer term.

To facilitate understanding for academic scholars and professional practice, a strategic augmented SME growth matrix has been developed based on the findings, which also operationalises the conceptual framework (objective 4). The SME growth matrix in Figure 6.2 illustrates how SMEs growth trajectory may be influenced by both socially enabled and economically enabled entrepreneurial leadership. This has emerged from the extant literature on entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth. The SME growth matrix contribution emerging from this thesis establishes the concept of augmented growth. It also raises questions and opportunities for further research (Section 7.5) In addition, the SME growth matrix may serve as a communication reference for policy design.

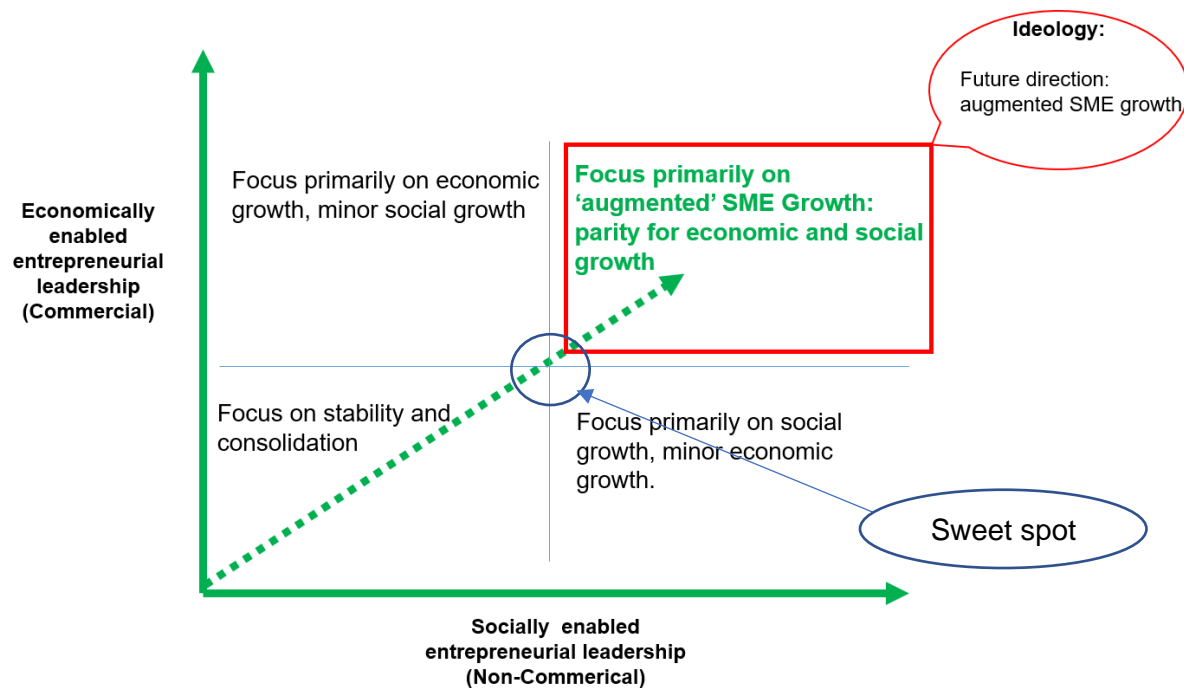


Figure 6.2 Entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth matrix. (Authors contribution)

The matrix in Figure 6.2 proposes that SME growth theory prospects to be best positioned in the augmented SME growth quadrant, advocating a more purposeful SME growth. However, the existing theory of entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth positions an SME in a primarily economic top left growth quadrant, which suggests that a profit focused prosperity SME growth model exists (Storey, 1994; Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Hermans et al., 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Hauser et al., 2020). This is aligned with the research question for this research, exploring whether SME entrepreneurial leaders generate both economic and social growth rather than a singular linear profit driven growth trajectory (McQuade et al., 2021; Sharif and Scandura, 2014; Widyani, et al., 2020; Aishah et al., 2020; Sarmawa et al., 2020; Davidsson et al., 2022).

Below this quadrant, the focus on stability and consolidation quadrant identifies those commercial entrepreneurial leaders that simply sustain and stabilise the growth of their SME but also may contribute to local social and community prosperity. This quadrant reaches into the area of 'stable growth' or 'degrowth' (Gebauer 2018; Gebauer et al., 2023). This quadrant reveals, from this research, a further area to be explored coined



by Anderson and Ullah (2014) as the condition of smallness in SMEs. Further research (Section 7.5) could explore the motivation for SME entrepreneurial leaders 'not' to grow their business and does this reasoning coalesce around lifestyle, wellbeing, and work life balance (Weber et al., 2015; Douglas, 2013; Welbourne et al., 2012).

The bottom right quadrant locates social enterprises that primarily drive social impact but also generate significant commercial profit to do so. From the findings for this research, it could be interesting research to explore the commercial motivations of social entrepreneurial leaders and what lessons could be shared across the private and third sector type SMEs (Grieco, 2015; Perrini et al., 2020; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie, 2016).

Finally, there is the 'sweet spot' in the centre of the model (signified by a blue circle) whereby commercial entrepreneurial leadership contributes to the generation of augmented SME growth within a flourishing stakeholder driven economic society. From the findings from this research, 76% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated that embedding social responsibility into their business was important and 88% indicated that stakeholder relationships were important for the growth of their SME. The qualitative interviews also signposted the importance of stakeholder relationships "*I'm a huge fan of the social business concept doing well and doing good. So, I would like to further embed those types of agendas to have a positive social impact alongside the financial growth of the business*" (Interview No.1).

This is aligned to the core values of the 5<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution where there are core values around human centricity, sustainability, societal wellbeing, equality, diversity and inclusivity. Indeed, as Cohen (2020 p.22) argues, "There is an obvious need for a new system...where contribution confers greater status...and where firms who demonstrate social and environmental integrity are more successful".

In summary, there is a sense from the respondents that being socially responsible had a 'tipping point' where once the SME was flourishing economically, only then would entrepreneurial leaders consider more socially responsible intentions. Therefore, this suggests the initial priority of SME entrepreneurial leaders are their economic concerns. This shows that there seems to be a 'tipping point' economic level for each SME entrepreneurial leader that must be reached before their intentions shift to

become involved in the social growth activities of their SME. This is not supported in the literature but a surprising finding for this research encouraging further research (Section 7.5) in the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth. Such research would help to generate development tools for entrepreneurial leaders as to when the tipping point may occur and what it means for their business growth when it does.

As noted earlier in the thesis, this research questions the common assumption that high growth SMEs are the preferred option in entrepreneurial leadership theory (Daunfeldt, et al., 2015). The thesis has evidenced that there are a significant number of entrepreneurial leaders who seek to 'maximise profit' but also purposively generate 'augmented' SME growth. This perspective is important and relevant, as many individuals start a business for many reasons, not just the primary goal of making a profit (Davidsson, 1989a; Delmar, 1996; Kolvereid, 1992; Storey, 1994).

Furthermore, aligned to the Better Business Act (2021) this research advocates that there is a growing sector of SME businesses that may not report high measures of economic outputs. Nevertheless, they sustain their SMEs generating strong engagement with civic society, local community prosperity commensurate in contributing to augmented SME growth. SMEs also provide sustainable jobs for their employees, that also contribute significantly to direct and indirect economic benefit within their local community. Moreover, even SMEs that merely sustain stable measurable economic outputs of growth, are also likely to be instrumental in purposively enabling 'augmented' SME growth.

This research not only seeks to inform the theory of entrepreneurial leadership it also challenges the conventional SME growth measurement techniques using metrics (Wiklund et al., 2003; Ipinnaiye et al., 2017; Siddiqui and Jan 2017) that currently shape local government claims for economic development (Yazdanfar and Ohman, 2018; ONS, 2019). Moreover, Simpson et al. (2012) posit that SMEs should use multi-dimensional measures to define their success, which may be better aligned to an SME's business objectives. Subsequently, commercial SMEs in addition to economic growth, also exhibit social growth by way of contributing to community prosperity and enhanced societal cohesion (OECD, 2019). Remarkably, the positive impact of these

businesses on societal economic resilience, wellbeing and cohesion appears to be of less interest to government reporting and economic policy (Gasparin et al., 2020). Baxter et al. (2008) also claim that using a single measure does not capture the overall business performance appropriately. Eggers et al. (2013, 2020) support this position, asserting that success in SMEs is no longer only viewed as financial success as there is a trend toward SMEs being measured through a broader lens to assess their wider impact on community prosperity and societal wellbeing.

The aim of this research was to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth and the research question sought to resolve whether entrepreneurial leaders generate augmented SME growth. Having, completed the literature review (objective 1), created a conceptual framework, and completed empirical research (objective 2) to inform theory, policy and practice (objective 3 and 4) this discussion chapter has triangulated the objectives to achieve the research aim and research question. Accordingly, a proposed modified definition emerging from this research is that entrepreneurial leadership is a purposeful catalyst for augmented SME growth. Moreover, this research advocates a more holistic recognition of SME growth. Further research (Section 7.5) to design an SME social impact index could support in recognising a nation's economic and social progress. An SME social impact index could therefore plausibly report on the socio-economic impact of SMEs in a nation, given they are the backbone of an economy (Gebauer et al., 2023; Eggers, 2020). This concurs with Cohen (2020) who affirms impact weighted accounting as a new form of accounting that goes beyond profit to provide a more holistic perspective on the impact of business activities. The following chapter will draw together conclusions and recommendations from the research and provide implications for theory, policy and practice toward embedding and recognising the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to the generation of augmented SME growth.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1 Introduction

This research was inspired through increasing awareness of the purposeful role of entrepreneurial leaders beyond the conventional economic models typically found in a capitalist society. Consequently, the research question sought to evidence whether entrepreneurial leaders generate augmented SME growth. Augmented SME growth is defined as the shared outcomes of economic (commercial) and social growth in SMEs. This aligns to the aim of the research which was to explore entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

The components of this chapter outline the achievement of exploring the research question, attaining the four research objectives and subsequently the overall aim of the research. Objectives one and two are summarised individually followed by key findings and conclusions relative to each one. Objective three builds on objectives one and two and explains the implications for theory, policy, and practice in relation to the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented SME growth. Finally, objective four proposes and explains a strategic SME growth matrix as a tangible outcome of the thesis. A summary of the thesis contribution and achievement of the research question and subsequent aim are given followed by an overview of the limitations of the research. Then, recommendations for further research (Section 7.5) are proposed, finishing with a summary of the chapter.

It is useful to revisit the conceptual framework in Figure 7.1, below, which illustrates the tracking of objectives one to four and subsequent achievement of the research aim.

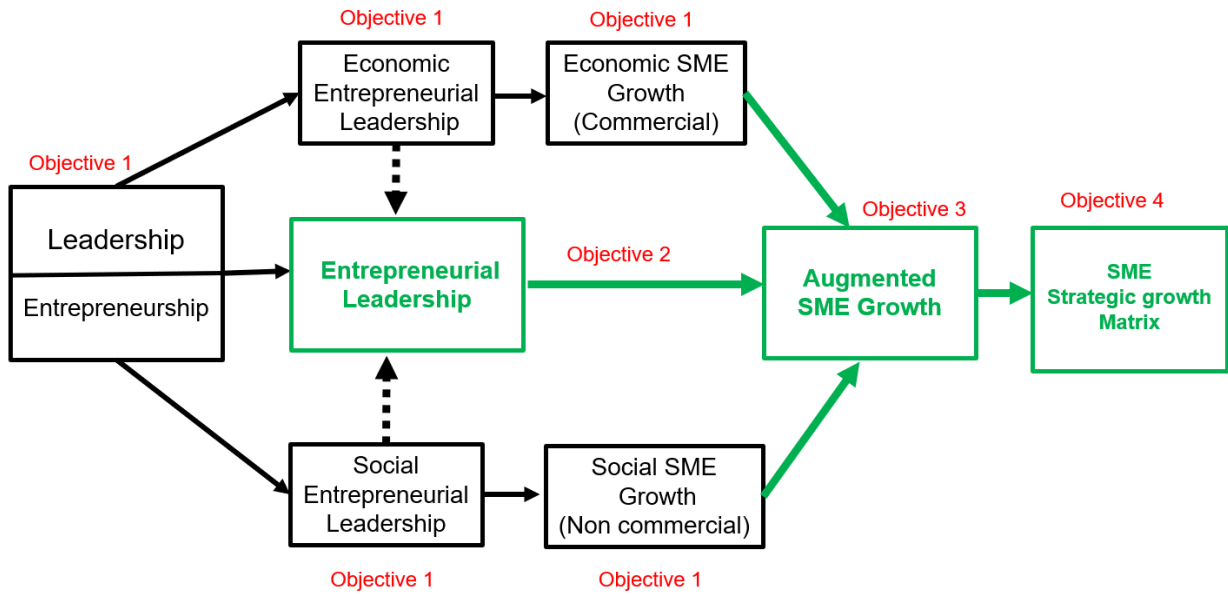


Figure 7.1 Tracking the research objectives across the conceptual framework for exploring the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth

To begin the research process a robust, systematic review of the literature examined the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth, principally in economic and social terms (objective 1). The conceptual framework in Figure 2.17 below (objective 2) has been annotated with the various relevant sections from the literature review.

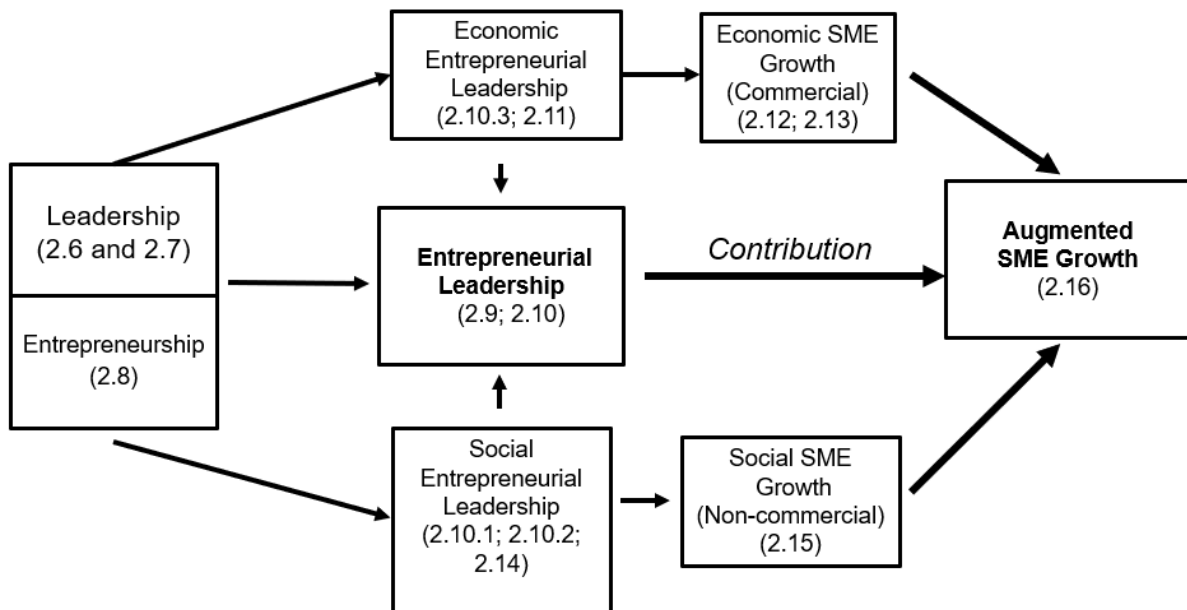


Figure 2.17 The conceptual framework aligned to the literature review

The literature review began with a comprehensive investigation into the evolution of leadership (2.5) and extended to review the leadership theory associated with enabling social SME growth value (2.6). To facilitate a deeper understanding of the more recent entrepreneurial leadership theory, the evolution of entrepreneurship was considered (2.7) converging with leadership (2.8) to form entrepreneurial leadership. From the evolution of entrepreneurial leadership (2.9) a discussion emerged from the evaluation of entrepreneurial leadership around social enabling intentions. Thereafter the more familiar economically enabling entrepreneurial leadership (2.10) was revealed along with the established associations with SME growth. For contextualisation, it was necessary to introduce the literature on SME growth (2.11) and the common assumptions of entrepreneurial leadership enabling economic SME growth (2.12). The discussion then led to a proposition that emphasises the social intentions of the entrepreneurial leader in SMEs (2.13). The literature review then goes on to explore where entrepreneurial leadership enables socially responsible SME growth (2.14) and finally, the challenge of measuring social SME growth was examined.

The key findings from the literature review discover that, whilst entrepreneurial leadership theory endorses economic growth in SMEs, there is a paucity of research

around the impact of the emergent socially enabling SME entrepreneurial leader (Pauceanu, 2021). Furthermore, the literature review, underpinned by government policy and reports evidenced how SME growth is validated by primarily economic means. However, considering the wider influence of industry 5.0 and shifting perceptions around more socially responsible SME entrepreneurial leaders, research into augmented SME growth is timely, providing an evidential emphasis on this change. To this end a conceptual framework (2.15) was presented that introduces the concept of augmented SME growth. Thereafter, the conceptual framework guides the research process and informs the operationalisation of the empirical research endeavouring to evidence that entrepreneurial leadership enables and generates augmented SME growth.

## 7.2 Achievement of the research question, objectives, and research aim

This research explored whether SME entrepreneurial leaders generate both societal and economic growth, defined in this research as augmented SME growth. Consequently, the aim of this research was to explore the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs. The research aim is achieved through the accomplishment of four research objectives. This section, therefore, identifies each research objective and summarises key findings and conclusions relative to each one.

### 7.2.1 Objective One

To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth principally in social and economic terms.

#### 7.2.1.1 Entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth in social terms

The key findings in the empirical research evidenced a more socially enabling entrepreneurial leader whereby 83% of entrepreneurial leaders of NI SMEs identified their own 'work life balance' as important to their SME growth.

The findings also revealed that 93% of entrepreneurial leaders identified their own 'wellbeing' as important to their SME growth. Theme (A) that emerged from the qualitative interviews identified that entrepreneurial leaders valued self-care during SME growth and demonstrated behaviours on the maintenance of an appropriate work life balance.

*“When you start to understand the whole relationship in your body between stress and the release of the hormones...I couldn't see the damage I was doing internally. So, my work life balance had to change. I am very disciplined in terms of my work life balance now” (Interview No.14).*

This suggests there is socially responsible intentions and behaviours of entrepreneurial leaders around personal care and wellbeing in relation to augmented SME growth. Entrepreneurial leaders also valued stakeholder perceptions, and the notion of a 'caring leader for others' in the process of leading SME growth. Indeed, this was illustrated where the findings disclosed that 87% of entrepreneurial leaders preferred to be known as a 'caring' leader by stakeholders. Entrepreneurial leaders perceived stakeholder descriptions from the qualitative interviews are presented below. Entrepreneurial leaders prefer to be described by stakeholders as:

*“Caring and honest” (Interview No. 13),*

*“Can trust me to listen” (Interview No.19),*

*“Helpful” (Interview No.6)*

Building on the 'caring' nature of entrepreneurial leaders, 95% of entrepreneurial leaders agreed that employee wellbeing was important for business growth. There is also evidence to suggest that entrepreneurial leaders invest in their employee development. Indeed, 89% agreed developing employee skills to be important and 78% indicated professional development on courses to be important for their SME growth. This aligns to the relevance of how employee growth, development and wellbeing contributes to wider community prosperity, where the SME is located.

Overall, these findings signal that many entrepreneurial leaders do more than exploit opportunity for purely economic reasons and apply social intentions in SME growth for



both them and their stakeholders, be those employees or others in the wider community. As Cohen (2020 p.24) argues “it is time businesses started to value more than mere money”. Accordingly, this indicates many entrepreneurial leadership decisions are therefore ‘more than’ purely economic and may in fact contribute to the socially responsible element of SME growth.

Having explored within objective one, the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of SME growth from a social perspective, it was now necessary to establish the renowned relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and economic SME growth.

#### 7.2.1.2 Entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth in economic terms

Continuing with objective one and exploring the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and economic SME growth in Theme (B), the data showed that 74% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated growing their business was important. Aligned to this were some indicative interview responses:

*“Financial profit is so important as it allows me to reinvest back into the business and afford a certain lifestyle” (Interview No.5)*

*“I think we all want to make money in our business...through every opportunity I get, I think how is this going to improve my business and make it better? ...constantly striving to make it more profitable” (Interview No. 6).*

Noting that 12% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated growing their business was unimportant is surprising. However, it is pertinent to consider the raised awareness of the importance of work life balance and wellbeing, suggesting a lifestyle entrepreneurial leader, who is more socially orientated whereby the pursuit of wellbeing over profit was a more important priority as indicated in the responses below.

*“I have reached capacity so it would put me under more pressure to grow anymore...the biggest challenge to me would be growing my business to a size I could not cope, and it is just finding that balance”. (Interview No.3).*

*“So, I don’t want to grow my business...I just want to sustain my business growth” (Interview No.4).*

Another key finding was that whilst 95% of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs intended to sustain or grow their business in the next 3 years, it is surprising that 5% of SME entrepreneurial leaders selected 'scaling back' their economic business growth as a primary intention. Some qualitative responses were revealing in this regard:

*"I actually want to make less money, do less hours and spend more time with my family enjoying the money I make" (Interview No.10).*

*"I am not looking to grow my business; I did not set out to grow my business...what it means to me is bringing in enough money that it allows me to live for today" (Interview No.10).*

Understanding entrepreneurial leadership intentions to not grow an SME is another research topic (see section 7.5), although it may be that the SME entrepreneurial leader has questioned the importance of their wellbeing and work life balance over economic gain. This suggests a higher social conscience, toward augmented SME growth and signals a societal move away from profit focused prosperity.

A further interesting finding in entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth in economic terms was the respondents understanding of the meaning of SME growth. Indeed, the meaning of SME growth is complex as there are many variations around its measurement. The data evidenced that conventionally the most popular measurement metric from the entrepreneurial leader's perspective was profit (49%) and the metric deemed least used to measure SME growth was job creation (5%):

*"Business growth means new business growth in sales and profit margins...turnover is vanity and profit is sanity, you know the old cliché" (Interview No.17).*

Sales was the second largest growth indicator (29%) followed by connecting with the community (16%). Interestingly, this may signal a growing importance to 'connect with the community' and to use social growth activities as a measure of growth. This was also illustrated in one entrepreneurial leader comment:

*"Financial goals are important metrics for my business...but a business is much more than pounds and pence" (Interview No.8).*

In summary, the research suggests that the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented SME growth is significant in consideration of work life balance, wellbeing, and economic SME growth. The conceptual framework therefore was a useful guide in achieving the research aim of exploring the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented SME growth in the context of Northern Ireland SMEs.

### 7.2.2 Objective two

To design a conceptual framework and attest the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 7.2 below, builds on objective one and illustrates the complex and interconnected relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth. The green arrows in the conceptual framework focus where the empirical research provides indicative evidence of the contribution of the entrepreneurial leader in generating augmented SME growth. Consequently, the more socially enabling SME entrepreneurial leader is revealed.

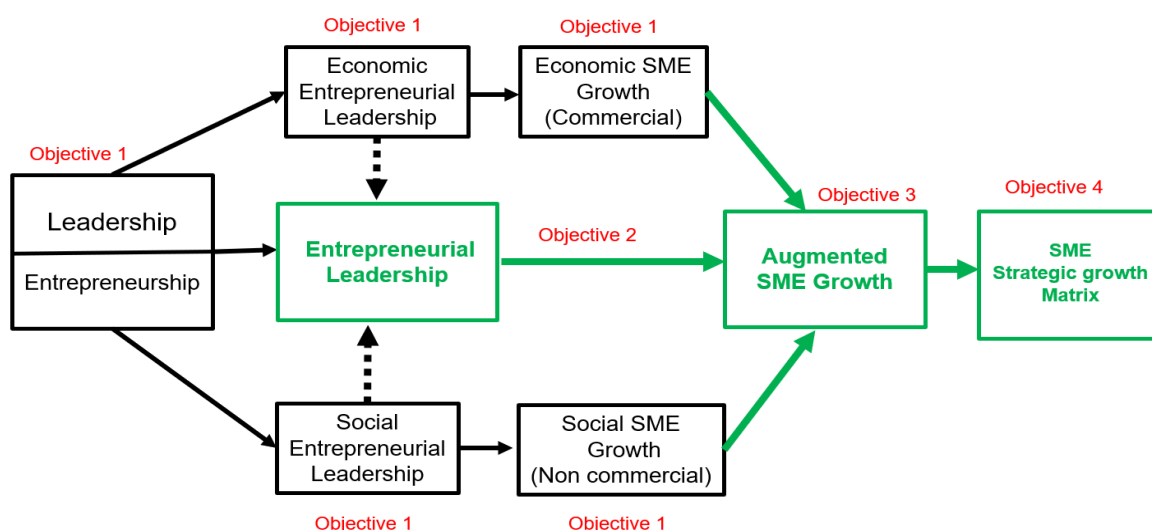


Figure 7.1 Tracking the research objectives across the conceptual framework for investigating the contribution of entrepreneurial leadership to augmented SME growth

For objective two, the main emerging Theme C, was the acknowledgement that 49% of entrepreneurial leaders thought it important to embed their business in local community development to enable augmented SME growth. Whilst 49% was just less than half of the entrepreneurial leaders who felt it important, it does signal some change in thinking around enabling socially responsible growth within commercial SMEs. It would be an interesting research focus for a longitudinal study to establish if this continues to be a rising statistic in 21<sup>st</sup> Century SMEs given the carbon reduction agenda (see section 7.5). Moreover, considering the gender balance of respondents, female entrepreneurial leaders could signal stronger intentions for social SME growth activities, or indeed a particular age demographic, yielding two other potential areas for research (see section 7.5). Furthermore, the relatively low importance of social growth by entrepreneurial leaders may also be due to a lack of awareness around the elements that underpin social responsibility and consequently not considered an important component of SME growth for measurement purposes.

Indeed, whilst economic intentions were clearly the primary purpose and concern of commercial SMEs there does appear to be a 'tipping point' in SME growth, when financial security meets lifestyle and wellbeing objectives. It appears that once the milestone of financial security or economic safety is achieved, the social enabling intentions then may be ignited. The qualitative interviews provide some explanation for this intention in the findings:

*"As long as we have the financial security only then we could do more of this pro-bono work" (Interview No.7).*

*"Once I get to an income level that I have in my head... I'm happy to do those sorts of things. But until I get there, I'm going to be doing none of those things" (Interview No.9).*

This concurs with the analogy of oxygen masks in an inflight emergency where the instructions are 'secure your own oxygen mask before helping anyone else'. Certainly, SME entrepreneurial leaders need to be economically safe and secure before they can enable socially responsible growth for others beyond their own SMEs.

Arguably however, there may be a lack of understanding as to what socially responsible growth in SMEs means to entrepreneurial leaders. Building stakeholder relationships is an important socially responsible growth activity for entrepreneurial

leaders, where 88% of entrepreneurial leaders identified stakeholder relationships within their community as important for SME growth. Furthermore 66% of entrepreneurial leaders recognised the importance of reciprocal relationships with their stakeholder community for SME growth, signalling a sense of the importance of socially responsible growth. In addition to this, given the opportunity to select engagement in community activities, the research indicated that entrepreneurial leaders engaged on average in 2.5 activities annually, some of the most common activities was volunteering at Young Enterprise activities, local B2B events and sponsoring local charities.

Furthermore, entrepreneurial leaders showed socially responsible growth intentions in their SMEs toward the 'carbon reduction, climate crisis and green agenda' all of which evidence socially responsible SME growth. The findings indicated that over three quarters (76%) of SME entrepreneurial leaders identified the importance of embedding social responsibility strategically and operationally in SME growth. The qualitative interviews also revealed:

*"I'm a kind of eco warrior guy, we print virtually zero, my next car will be an electric car. We recycle everything. And we support a number of businesses who engage in sustainability processes" (Interview No.1).*

*"... the environment is a really important thing and there is a growing consciousness that we need to do more to help our grandchildren" (Interview No.12).*

*"...it's something that consumers expect now and it's something that we feel very strongly about" (Interview No.13).*

These findings suggest a growing social conscience in entrepreneurial leaders and indicates their intentions to embed socially responsible and sustainable practices into their SMEs. This may be in response to the global climate crisis and the SDG 2030 movement. Furthermore, it should be noted that the age profile of entrepreneurial leaders for this research was older whereby 66% were over the age of 46. Maybe a younger demographic of entrepreneurial leaders targeted in empirical research could provide differing indicators for sustainability intentions (see section 7.5).

The findings also evidenced that 71% of entrepreneurial leaders saw no value in formally measuring 'social value' generated from their SME and the positive impact these activities had on their community prosperity. Indeed, many SME leaders were unaware of the positive social impact they had on their communities (Balluchi and Furlotti, 2013) and it was not traditionally reported in SME annual accounts. Whilst 85% of entrepreneurial leaders collected data on customer feedback, only 29% indicated they measured community engagement and 35% collected performance data on environmental and sustainability practices.

*I do not record it anywhere formally...I would need to figure it out at the end of each year (Interview No.5)*

*"I guess it is a legal requirement to measure your income and profit to pay tax but it is not illegal to not measure your non-commercial activities. It's not easy to measure non-commercial activities, but it's still very valuable and I guess we should have to measure everything that is valuable" (Interview No.19).*

*No, I don't... though I think it should be. It's something I always want to do and I enjoy it. I think the government should take into consideration that businesses that are doing well are growing and giving to the community should have an incentive for pro bono guidance and help (Interview No. 9).*

The research noted that only those businesses with 10+ employees collected any data to evidence their socially responsible contribution to environmental initiatives, in line with carbon reduction. This evidence accords with larger SMEs having the resources to record such activities as part of a CSR strategy, whilst smaller SMEs are more under resourced, pressured and rarely measure such. Indeed, it is arguable that since entrepreneurial leaders of smaller SMEs do not measure their social impact, they may dismiss it as not particularly valuable to them in economic or other terms. However, such information on the contribution of a nation's smaller SMEs to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 could be valuable to national governments reporting globally on climate change. Interestingly, Cohen (2020 p.24) referred recently to a new form of "impact weighted accounting", that goes beyond profit and loss to provide a more holistic picture of the true impact of business activities. Arguably, entrepreneurial leaders are merely unaware of their unconscious 'intention' to do more than generate

profit and therefore a strategic SME growth matrix would be useful to aid understanding for theory, policy, and practice (see section 7.2.4).

The rising concept of Industry 5.0 (Xu et al., 2021) shows a growing interest in the core values of human-centricity, sustainability and resilience supported by recent government policy (Paris Agreement, 2015; SDGs 2015; The economy of Wellbeing, Llena-Nozal, 2019; OECD Better Life Index, 2021; Better Business Act, 2021). Hence Industry 5.0 recognises how business and commerce can achieve social impact beyond jobs and become a robust provider of community prosperity. Therefore, there is a move away from profit focused prosperity toward more societal focused prosperity and wellbeing underpinned by processes promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion. Hence, the messages from the global socio-economic environment are clear, business strategies must include environmental and social factors grounded in good governance (Fenwick et al., 2022) using Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) metrics.

Interestingly, Theme (D) findings were associated with those SMEs who had employees and are integral to local societal prosperity and wellbeing. Indeed, 94% of entrepreneurial leaders identified employee wellbeing as important and 89% suggested it was important to invest in their employee skills illustrating their values in socially enabling 'employee' personal development. Breque et al. (2021) argues that reskilling and upskilling of employees can secure a healthy work life balance. For some entrepreneurial leaders this was an important activity for enabling social growth as illustrated in the comment below:

*“We continually train and develop our staff as you're putting money back into the community by raising local skillsets. It is the bedrock of our economy. It needs to be very much nurtured and encouraged and that is success” (Interview No.9).*

Interestingly, 38% of entrepreneurial leaders with employees reported that it was important to enable employees to engage in social impact activities external to the SME. The qualitative interviews signalled where entrepreneurial leaders linked this to employee wellbeing:

*“I think people need to do non-commercial activities if nothing else it helps their frame of thinking and how to do their job” (Interview No.11).*

*“I have a very positive view of this because volunteering concerns their self-esteem and their sense of self” (Interview No. 2).*

It is notable that whilst 94% of entrepreneurial leaders understood the importance of employee wellbeing 62% indicated, they did not feel accountable for facilitating activities to uphold this component of their workplace values. It might be suggested that culturally, Northern Ireland are at an immature stage in this thinking and practice of resourcing employee wellbeing practices. Subsequently, research outside Northern Ireland on entrepreneurial leadership and employee wellbeing may reveal other insights from a cultural perspective, where thinking and practice are more advanced (see section 7.5).

The conceptual framework has attempted to serve a means to attest the complex and interconnected relationship between the entrepreneurial leader and augmented SME growth. It has endeavoured to illuminate the thesis contribution to extending the theory of entrepreneurial leadership and signals plausible evidence of a nuanced entrepreneurial leadership encompassing economically enabled leadership and socially responsible leadership delivering augmented growth in SMEs. Subsequently, entrepreneurial leadership may be defined as a purposeful catalyst for augmented SME growth. Ultimately this contributes more purposively to a region’s overall socio-economy and a post growth ‘economy of enoughness’ where resources are distributed equitably and everyone can live well with enough’ (Gebauer, 2018 p.232).

### 7.2.3 Objective three

To explain the significance of augmented SME growth and subsequent implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory, policy, and practice.

Objective 3 was met through building on the achievements of objectives one (Theme A and B) and objective two (Theme C and D), and the discussion (chapter 6) which



builds on the complex and interrelated relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth. This section will crystallise the research objectives by addressing the research question on exploring the role of entrepreneurial leadership in generating augmented SME growth and the subsequent implications for theory, policy, and practice.

#### 7.2.3.1 The entrepreneurial leaders' personal work intentions (Objective 1 Theme A) Implications for theory, policy, and practice

The theory of entrepreneurial leadership could be extended to include the importance of personal lifestyle intentions and stakeholder relationships which can influence the decisions and therefore actions of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs. Renko et al. (2015 p.58) argue that entrepreneurial leadership is defined as “influencing and directing the performance of group members toward achieving those organisational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities”. This research evidenced that entrepreneurial leadership often goes beyond exploiting economic opportunities in SMEs and should include values around work life balance (Welbourne et al., 2012; Weber et al., 2015; Bandura, 1997), stakeholder relationships (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2003; Pinho and Prange 2016; Rae, 2017; Markley et al., 2015; Leavy, 2012;) and influencing intentions (Ajzen, 1991; McKelvie et al., 2017) of entrepreneurial leaders' generation of augmented SME growth.

One implication for policy from objective one (Theme A), would be in promoting the relative importance of attributes relating to the entrepreneurial leader's lifestyle, wellbeing, and stakeholder perceptions to generate augmented SME growth. This could, possibly be structured and operationalised through government or arm's length development organisations. Collectively these organisations would promote relevant resources and signposting to professional development programmes in Further/Higher Education or private sector professional development businesses.

Implications for practice could include a contribution to curriculum design for entrepreneurial leadership in education and professional development programmes for SME owners. For example, in professional development, a coaching programme on enabling and embedding structured activities in personal self-care, lifestyle

balance, wellbeing and stakeholder relationships could be a significant catalyst in generating augmented SME growth. Knowledge on enabling personal lifestyle and stakeholder relationships to generate augmented SME growth could be transformative in entrepreneurial leadership decisions for local socio-economic development. Such developments in professional practice for entrepreneurial leader's pre-start-up activities could utilise critical action learning (CAL) (Trehan and Rigg, 2015) to advance their purposeful planning for 'augmented' SME growth, from the outset of their enterprise, given they primarily desire financial security at that stage.

#### 7.2.3.2 The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic SME growth (Objective One Theme B) Implications for theory, policy, and practice

The implications of these findings (Theme B) concur with the established literature (Renko et al., 2015) that an entrepreneurial leader's primary intention is to attain economic growth in their SME (Storey, 1994; Siddiqui and Jan, 2017; Gray, 2000, Maki and Pukkinen, 2000; Davidsson and Wiklund, 2006; Hermans et al. 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017 Bhidé, 1999; Venkataraman, 1997; Davidsson et al., 2002; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2003).

Recommendations for policy suggest governments use a more holistic means than singular job creation, as a measure of SME growth. Entrepreneurial leaders indicated from the findings that job creation (5%) was the least used measure of SME growth and so there appears to be a mismatch in performance indicators for local government reporting on job creation as the main measure of SME growth and the relevance of this to SME entrepreneurial leaders. Arguably an augmented SME growth measure beyond job creation, facilitated by government policy, could provide a more pragmatic, holistic, and future facing measure of augmented SME growth.

With regards to practice, innovating to a more holistic metric for augmented SME growth may provide a more 'real' or rounded means to measure the augmented growth value SMEs contribute to their societal prosperity and wellbeing. This could be in the form of a simple social impact index that measures internal and external contributions to the SME in the former and to wider society in the latter.

### 7.2.3.3 The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth (Objective Two Theme C) Implications for theory, policy, and practice

It is well established in the social entrepreneurial leadership literature that social enterprises enable social growth (Smith et al., 2011; Rae, 2017; Tian and Smith, 2014; Thompson, 2002). This research however revealed a 'gap' in the entrepreneurial leadership literature on the role of entrepreneurial leadership in enabling SME social growth in a more commercial context. Indeed, 66% of entrepreneurial leaders agree it is important to have a good relationship with their local community and over 75% indicated the importance of embedding environmental sustainability practices and processes in their SME.

Implications for policy could be for governments to consider the design and inclusion of innovative metrics to measure and incentivise SMEs to report on the contribution being made to positive social impact and environmental sustainability (Grieco, 2015; Perrini et al., 2020; Hlady-Rispal and Servantie, 2016) see section 7.5. It would however be disappointing if government used punitive measures on SMEs who did not comply with these measures, as this would impede any cultural transformation toward the generation of augmented SME growth. Indeed PWC (2022 p.1) claims "reaching net zero is one of the biggest challenges we collectively face...this is not just about compliance, it's about driving change and creating competitive advantage. Demonstrating progress, with robust and reliable data, will not only create trust, but add value".

Implications for practice include enabling entrepreneurial leaders, through professional leadership development to raise awareness on social responsibility and how to embed transformative operational innovations for social impact and environmental sustainability to continuously generate augmented SME growth. Again, Trehan and Rigg (2015) critical action learning could be a pragmatic framework for this leadership development.

#### 7.2.3.4 The entrepreneurial leader enabling social SME growth through employees (Objective Two Theme D) Implications for theory, policy, and practice

Implications for entrepreneurial leadership theory can be drawn from the well-established social enterprise literature (Radulovich et al., 2018; Graafland et al., 2003; Cochius, 2006; Henry, 2012; Tan and Meyer, 2010; Lyons et al., 2012; Hynes, 2009; Tang et al., 2016; Douglas, 2013) on leading employees on social growth activities for their wellbeing. Furthermore, given that employees are the biggest social resource in SME growth, this would concur with the evidence that 89% of entrepreneurial leaders identified the importance of developing employee skills to attain augmented SME growth (Pinho and Prange 2016; Spears, 2010; VanDerdonck 2010). From the research sample 68% of entrepreneurial leaders identified employee appraisal as important to enable skills which could contribute to the operationalisation of augmented SME growth (Sarmawa et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2006). Furthermore, 76% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated the importance of the employee voice, which is also known as a means for social responsibility within SMEs (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Carter and Baghurst, 2014). Therefore, building relationships through 'caring' for employees is an important bedrock for augmented SME growth and the pandemic has highlighted this further where entrepreneurial leaders are more socially aware of the needs of employees outside of the physical workspace. This evidences a potential shift toward a more socially aware form of entrepreneurial leadership emerging in the current economic climate. Consequently Cohen (2020 p.24) purports "if we value the contribution made by people and businesses to society and to the planet, as well as the money they make, that will lead to a new definition of success...and the value of profit itself".

Implications for policy could be in the form of fiscal and financial incentives 'pilot' for SMEs. For example, a marginal percentage reduction in employer tax contributions, reduced against evidenced investment in employee development. This incentive could encourage more entrepreneurial leaders to develop employee skills to generate augmented SME growth. However, there are limitations to fiscal and financial incentives that can be short term in nature, and they can hinder the 'culture' change required in raising awareness of carbon reduction and the triple bottom line approach.

In practice entrepreneurial leaders of commercial SMEs could seek to develop a supportive culture and invest in their employees socially responsible skills, enabling them to internally innovate processes and procedures to generate augmented SME growth.

#### 7.2.4 Objective four

To propose recommendations for future SME policy in this area

The conceptual framework and research contribution has endeavoured to explain the complex and interconnected relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth and from this a strategic SME growth matrix emerged. The matrix in Figure 7.3 below seeks to illustrate the position of augmented SME growth within the extant literature on SME growth and a socially and economically enabled entrepreneurial leadership. It proposes that growing SMEs, are likely to be better positioned in the augmented growth quadrant.

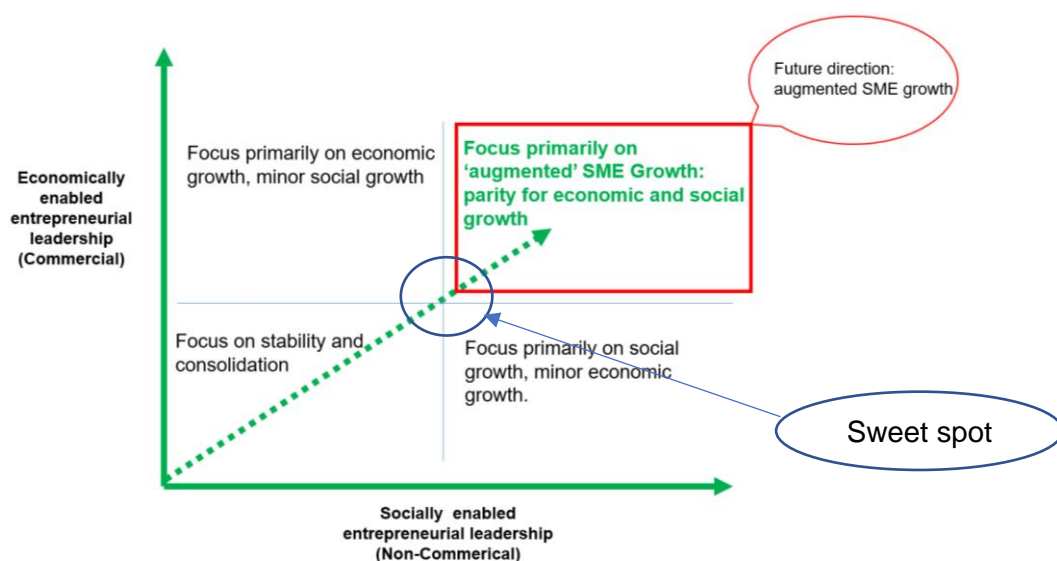


Figure 7.2 Augmented SME growth Matrix. (Authors Contribution)

As mentioned earlier, the conventional theory of entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth, positions the SME in the economic growth quadrant (top left) and where the profit focused SME exists. Below this (bottom left) the stability and consolidation quadrant identified those entrepreneurial leaders who have no desire to grow their

SME but contribute decisively to societal prosperity. The third (bottom right) quadrant locates the social enterprise that primarily drives social impact but also generates significant commercial profit to do so. Finally, the 'sweet spot' (top right) augmented SME growth where entrepreneurial leaders are both economically and socially driven and thrive in a flourishing stakeholder driven economic society. Indeed, as Cohen (2020 p.22) argues, "There is an obvious need for a new system...where contribution confers greater status...and where firms who demonstrate social and environmental integrity are more successful". Furthermore, PWC (2022 p.1) positions that sustainability in business is strategy and argues that "creating a world where we can live and work sustainably is an urgent imperative, and expectations are growing for business to be part of the solution".

Regarding policy recommendations the SME augmented growth matrix could inform future SME growth policy in how they can better support SMEs to engage in augmented SME growth. Furthermore, if government policy on SMEs recognised, incentivised (tax relief) and reported on SME augmented growth, this could provide evidence of a nations achievement of their Global Sustainable Development Goals (2030).

### 7.3 The contribution to knowledge

The conceptual framework, strategic SME growth matrix and subsequent research discussion suggest that current entrepreneurial leadership theory may be limited to a more capitalist climate (Kuratako, 2007). Given the ever-rising social conscience as evidenced at the Conference of the Parties (COP26, Glasgow, 2021), for example, evidently the global endeavor to tackle the climate crisis is paramount. Moreover, governments have been embedding these values in policy (Paris Agreement, 2015; SDGs 2015; Wellbeing of future generations, 2015; The economy of Wellbeing, Llena-Nozal, 2019; OECD Better Life Index, 2021, The Better Business Act, 2021). Furthermore, SMEs represent 99% of all businesses and often referred to as the backbone of an economy (Gebauer et al., 2023) and lifeblood of local community prosperity and wellbeing. Therefore, the contribution to knowledge is to propose an extension to the current theory of entrepreneurial leadership to a more socially

conscious and responsible definition where entrepreneurial leadership is a purposeful catalyst for augmented SME growth.

Further contribution of the thesis is the creation of an SME augmented growth matrix, as a reference tool between academia and government to agree on further research to inform policy on SME growth. Within the matrix the emergence of a 'sweet spot' where the entrepreneurial leader attains economic safety and augmented growth begins to be generated.

The research also contributes to government policy on how SME growth should be measured highlighting that no 'gold standard' exists. The thesis proposes that government should consider measures beyond 'job creation' and fund research into finding a simple social index method that supports the measurement of augmented SME growth (see section 7.5).

Finally, Yawson (2016) advocates for a mixed method approach to leadership research informing a non-linear epistemology. Researchers who use mixed methods approach in leadership research he purports are 'pioneers of the brave new world of mixed methods' (Yawson, 2016 p.265).

#### 7.4 Limitations of the research

Research on SMEs and entrepreneurial leadership is complex with numerous, ever-changing variables and therefore it is challenging to gain robust generalisations that will apply to all SMEs and entrepreneurial leaders. This restricts the research findings and subsequent implications for theory, policy and practice and it is therefore important to qualify and contextualise conclusions.

Secondly, the sample itself provides a limitation to the researcher's quantitative data collection for validity, however the author is satisfied when comparable to other SME surveys. Overall, 204 entrepreneurial leaders were surveyed as a sample when the population of SMEs in Northern Ireland is 124,000 SMEs (Northern Ireland Enterprise Barometer, 2021). In addition, the qualitative semi-structured interviews were secured with 20 entrepreneurial leader participants using convenience sampling, this again challenges the reliability and validity of the survey responses.

The researcher is also aware of the potential bias that may occur in the coding of the qualitative data and peer coding would be a more rigorous and reliable approach.

The research was not longitudinal which is often preferred for the study of such complex entities as entrepreneurial leaders and SMEs. However, the counter argument is that SMEs are constantly changing in such a dynamic environment that snapshot research can be more valuable to inform theory, policy, and practice as a fluid approach.

The age range of the sample of entrepreneurial leaders is also an identified limitation. Sixty six percent of the sample were aged 46-60, contrary to the GEM (2019) that reports entrepreneurial leaders to have an average age of 25-44. Only 25% of the sample were aged 31-45. This could have implications for bias responses on social responsibility given the social media influence of SDGs on younger demographics.

There is also a lack of consistency in the proportion of business sectors as reported in the gray literature. Whilst this provides some interesting insights there are potential nuances in particular sectors and therefore the research is challenged to generalise findings.

Finally, the epistemology of the research could be perceived as a limitation from the perspective that producing pragmatic research by abduction using a mixed method approach has been scrutinized by scholars of social science research who prefer the reliability of positivism and interpretivism to build theory.

## 7.5 Recommendations for Further Research

This section presents a summary of the references to further research which have been identified throughout this thesis.

1. Future research should explore augmented growth of SMEs in other geographical region beyond Northern Ireland to aid generalisation. This research was limited to Northern Ireland as a geographical region and therefore conducting research into other developed and developing economies could reveal deeper cultural insights into entrepreneurial leadership and the



generation of augmented SME growth. A suggested research question is: Do cultural factors influence the entrepreneurial leader's generation of augmented SME growth?

2. There is a need for research which explores SMEs motivation for 'no' economic SME growth or indeed degrowth (Gebauer, 2018). The study focused on the intentions of the entrepreneurial leader and revealed that 19% of entrepreneurial leaders sampled had no desire to economically grow their business and a further 5% indicated they wanted to scale back or degrow their businesses. Equally, 12% of entrepreneurial leaders indicated growing their business was unimportant. It would be beneficial for policy on economic development to further understand why some entrepreneurial leaders do not want to grow their SME in a developing economy. A suggested research question is: Why do entrepreneurial leaders actively maintain stable or degrowth in their SME?
3. There would be value in exploring the impact of gender in relation to the generation of augmented SME growth. The study focused on an inclusive research population sample. However, further research could be undertaken to explore whether female entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs influence the generation of augmented growth differently compared to male entrepreneurial leaders. This could have implications for policy change to incentivise equality measures to encourage augmented SME growth. A suggested research question is: Does gender influence the generation of augmented SME growth.
4. Future research should also delve into the characteristics of the entrepreneurial leaders and in particular explore if the age of the SME entrepreneurial leader impacts the generation of augmented SME growth. One of the limitations of the research indicates that 66% of the sample were over the age of 46. Research to reveal whether the younger generations of entrepreneurial leaders are aware and/or more likely to design augmented SME growth systems into their SMEs from inception would be insightful, mindful of the climate crisis, COP27 and the global drive to meet the 2030 SDG's. The suggested research question is: Does age influence the generation of augmented SME growth.

5. A novel perspective to explore further is to analyse start-ups and where the tipping point is for the generation of augmented SME growth. This research indicated that entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs desired personal economic safety before they believed they were able to enable socially responsible growth in their SMEs. Knowledge to predict when the augmented growth 'tipping point' occurs in an SME would be beneficial. This knowledge could inform government incentives to inspire the social enabling entrepreneurial leader to engage from 'start-up', on meaningful activities to enhance community prosperity and societal wellbeing. A suggested research question is: When does the tipping point occur and SME entrepreneurial leaders generate augmented growth.
6. Finally, this research could be expanded through the exploration, design and development of a social impact index to recognise augmented SME growth. The research sought to establish the existence of augmented SME growth led by socially responsible commercial entrepreneurial leaders. There are many ways to measure SME growth economically and job creation is the universal method used by governments to report on local economic development. Research to discover a more holistic social impact index augmented SME growth would be beneficial for society to evaluate socio-economic impact. Whilst ESGs and B Corporations are attempting to evaluate social impact a holistic social impact index would be more impactful. This would facilitate universal reporting on augmented SME growth given SMEs represent 99.9% of the Northern Ireland business economy and 99.2% of the UK economy or sector. A suggested research question is: Is there a mechanism to holistically measure the augmented growth value of commercial SMEs?

## 7.6 Chapter summary

This chapter demonstrated the progression and development of the research to answer the research question and achieve the research aim and objectives. This research explored the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the generation of augmented SME growth. The conceptual framework tracked the research objectives and explained the complex and interconnected role of entrepreneurial leadership in

the generation of augmented SME growth. This resulted in identification of key findings, conclusions and implications for theory, policy and practice in entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth. The limitations of the research have been identified leading to recommendations for further research and subsequent questions to be explored.

This research reveals that whilst commercial growth is crucial to business survival and economic development, SME entrepreneurial leaders also contribute significantly to societal prosperity and wellbeing. This contribution to societal value appears to remain unrecognised by government policy. Pragmatically the research findings inform the design of a strategic SME growth matrix as a tangible outcome and mechanism to explain an augmented SME growth trajectory through the entrepreneurial leader's economic and socially responsible leadership.

Since SMEs represent 99.9% of businesses and are the backbone to the Northern Ireland economy, it is surprising that their contribution to community prosperity and wellbeing is predominantly unmeasured. The current measure used by government for SME growth is primarily job creation which appears to be a relatively blunt instrument and demands further consideration by policy makers for a more holistic means to measure augmented SME growth.

Furthermore, conventional entrepreneurial leadership theory focused on exploitation of opportunity for profit maximisation, however this research suggests a new lens for the definition of entrepreneurial leadership. The research proposes a modification to the definition of entrepreneurial leadership incorporating purposeful social responsibility. Therefore, an extended definition of entrepreneurial leadership is a purposeful catalyst for augmented SME growth. To this end government policy could consider designing a means to recognise augmented SME growth and report more holistically on the significant value SMEs contribute to a nation's economy, wider societal prosperity, and wellbeing.

## Appendices

## Appendix 1 Questionnaire

# Entrepreneurial Leadership and SME Growth Survey in Northern Ireland

Q1 Hello, my name is Nikki McQuillan, and I am a lecturer and part-time doctoral student at Ulster University Business School. I am seeking entrepreneurial leaders from Northern Ireland's self-employed, micro, and SMEs (0-249 employees) to complete this survey.

This research aims to investigate the business growth intentions of entrepreneurial leaders beyond commercial goals. For instance these entrepreneurial leaders also implicitly contribute to environmental sustainability, engage in pro-bono support, community engagement and employee well-being (if applicable). The significance of the research is to contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial leadership in commercial SMEs and highlight their impact on enriching local community prosperity and well-being. On completion of reading the [Participant information guide](#) the survey should take you 10-15 minutes to complete.

Q2 **Participant Consent:** Thank you for participating in this survey where all the response data is anonymous unless you opt to provide your details for a follow-up interview. If you require further information, please download and read the copy of the [Participant information guide](#) and retain this document for your records before starting the survey.

Do you consent to the survey?

- I consent (1)
- I do not consent (2)

Q3 Screening Question: Are you the Owner/Founder, CEO, Managing Director or a Shareholder of the business?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Which best describes your role in the business?

- Owner and/or Founder (1)
- Managing Director and /or CEO (2)
- Shareholder (3)

Q5 Please select your age group:

- 18-30 Years (1)
- 31-45 Years (2)
- 46-60 Years (3)
- 61-70 Years (4)
- Over 70 Years (5)

Q6 Please select your gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q7 Select one category below that captures your main business function:

- Agriculture (1)
  - Professional Services: business support, financial, legal, marketing/PR; insurance, design and admin. services (2)
  - Creative Industries: arts, crafts, artisan, animation, film, publishing (3)
  - IT and Technology (4)
  - Health Care: medical therapy, nutrition, wellbeing services (5)
  - Consumer Services: retail, wholesale, tourism and hospitality (6)
  - Construction (7)
  - Manufacturing and Transport (8)
  - Other;                    please                    insert                    below                    (9)
- 

Q8 Are you a family business? (More than one family member in the business)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q9 How have your employment numbers changed during the past 12 months?

- Decreased (1)
- No Change (2)
- Increased (3)
- I have no employees (4)

Q10 Select the annual turnover of your business

- Less than £85K (1)
- £85-£250K (2)
- £250-£500K (3)
- £500K-£1 million (4)
- £1-£2 million (5)
- £2+ million (6)

Q11 Business Location: Council Area

- Mid Ulster (1)
- Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon (2)
- Lisburn City and Castlereagh (3)
- Mid and East Antrim (4)
- Fermanagh and Omagh (5)
- Newry and Down (6)
- Ards and North Down (7)
- Causeway Coast and Glens (8)



- Antrim and Newtownabbey (9)
- Derry City and Strabane (10)
- Belfast City (11)

Q12 How many years has your business been established?

- Less than 3 years (1)
- 3-5 Years (2)
- 6-10 Years (3)
- 11-25 Years (4)
- 25+ (5)

Q13 Please select one of the statements below that most applies to your business growth plans for the next 3 years

- Scaling back my business is my primary intention (1)
- Sustaining my business growth is my primary intention (flat line growth) (2)
- Steady growth is my primary intention (3)
- Rapid Growth is my primary intention (4)

Q14 Please **rank in order** of importance the most and least important to your business growth in the next 3 years (1 = Least Important and 4 = Most Important)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Sales (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Profit (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Job creation (employees) (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Connecting with my local community (4)

Q15 Please **rank in order** of importance the internal obstacles to your business growth?  
(1 =Least Important and 4 = Most Important)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Finance (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Capability/Skills (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Technology (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Project Management (time pressures) (4)

Q16 Select from the list below **any** of the following community integration activities your business engages in (Select all that apply)

- Primary/Secondary School Outreach (1)
  - Sponsorship of local sports teams/church groups/community Groups (2)
  - Sponsoring customers/employees/residents (3)
  - Local B2B events, think tanks and forums (4)
  - Sponsorship of community events (business /leisure) (5)
  - Reciprocal Business discounts for local neighbouring businesses (6)
  - Add value to a visiting tourist experience (7)
  - Sponsoring local charities (8)
  - Other or 'none of the above' please insert below (9)
-

Q17 Do you gather any information on the following from your business activities?

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Not Applicable (3)
Customer Feedback (Q16_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee Feedback (Q16_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community Engagement (Q16_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supplier Feedback (Q16_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sponsor/Stakeholder Feedback (Q16_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environmental protection practices (Q16_6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Engagement (Q16_7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Efficiency / Lean improvements (Q16_8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 Complete the following statements and indicate the importance to your business growth over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Maintaining the existing size of my business is... (Q17_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Growing my business is... (Q17_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Growing my business rapidly and profitably for a lucrative exit is... (Q17_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Growing export sales is... (Q17_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilising Government interventions to support my business is... (Q18_10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19 Complete the statements below from your **personal perspective** and how they apply to your business growth over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Embedding 'environmentally protective' processes into my business is... (Q18_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having a good relationship with my local community and associated businesses is... (Q18_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending local business networking events for my business is... (Q18_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending conferences to improve my business knowledge is... (Q18_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 Complete the statements below from your personal perspective and how they apply to your business growth over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Flexibility with 'personal time' in my business is... (Q38_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increasing my leisure time outside of business is... (Q38_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintaining my work/life balance is... (Q38_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21 Complete the statements below from your personal perspective and how they apply to your business growth over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Recognising that my local community is a stakeholder in my business is... (Q23_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring values as a leader are... (Q23_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generating good for my local community business network is... (Q23_6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22 Complete the statements below from your personal perspective and how they apply to your business growth over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
My own well-being is... (Q24_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Embedding my business in local community development activities is... (Q24_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being known as a successful business leader in my community is... (Q24_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q23 Please complete the following statements by selecting the most relevant response for leading your business over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Supporting local charities for fund raising... (Q26_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support Young Enterprise initiatives... (Q26_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Member of local community groups... (Q26_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Board of governor at local school... (Q26_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteer at local business or community think tank forums... (Q26_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q24 Please complete the following statements by selecting the most relevant response for leading your business over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Educational placements... (Q25_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engage local young people in part-time jobs... (Q25_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility around work/life balance for you or your team... (Q25_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local fundraising activities... (Q25_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating with local businesses through reciprocal sponsorship... (Q25_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q25 Please complete the following statements by selecting the most relevant response for leading your business over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Volunteering as a Board Member or Non Executive Director is... (Q27_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethical standards and practices in my supply chain are... (Q27_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Minimising carbon emission in my business is... (Q27_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Optimising energy/utilities in my business is... (Q27_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Efficiency/Lean improvement processes in my business are... (Q27_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q26 Please list in the text box below any other 'greater good' activities that you decide on within your business that are not listed in the previous question

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Q27 Please indicate the number of employees in the business

- Self Employed - No Employees (1)
- 1-9 Employees (2)
- 10-49 Employees (3)
- 50-99 Employees (4)
- 100-249 Employees (5)

Q28 Please complete the following statements by selecting the most relevant response for leading your business over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Developing the skills and knowledge of my employees is... (Q30_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responsibility for my employee well-being is... (Q30_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees having a say in operating my business is... (Q30_6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional Development of employees on short/long courses is... (Q29_7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wellbeing activities for employees is ... (Q29_8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q29 Please complete the following statements by selecting the most relevant response for leading your business over the next 3 years

	Extremely unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Encourage employees to engage with local community and school groups... (Q31_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Garner employee support for local community fundraisers... (Q31_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use an employee appraisal process... (Q31_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q30 What is the likely impact of Brexit on your business?

- Extremely Negative (1)
- Negative (2)
- Negligible (3)
- Positive (4)
- Extremely Positive (5)
- Don't know (6)

Q31 What current impact has Covid19 had on your business to date?

- Extremely Negative (1)
- Negative (2)
- Negligible (3)
- Positive (4)
- Extremely Positive (5)
- Don't know (6)

Q32 Would you be willing to give your details to be contacted for a 45 minute interview to explore entrepreneurial leadership beyond commercial goals in Northern Ireland SMEs?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q33 Please provide details if you would be willing to participate in a 45 minute interview to explore further entrepreneurial leadership beyond commercial goals in Northern Ireland SMEs.

- Name (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- Business Name: (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Email: (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of employees (insert zero if none) (7)

## Appendix 2 Participant Information Guide – Quantitative Data Collection

### **Participant Information Guide**

#### Research Project Title:

An investigation into entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs

#### Invitation:

My name is Nikki McQuillan, and I am a lecturer and part-time doctoral student at Ulster University Business School.

As part of my doctoral research, you are invited to take part in a research study to investigate entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

I was a co-founder and director of my own SME business for over 10 years 1999-2010. Naturally I have an interest in entrepreneurial leadership in commercial NI SMEs regarding their imperative contribution to local community prosperity and well-being.

Before you decide whether to take part, it is important that you understand what the research is for and what you will be asked to do. Please read the following information and do not hesitate to ask any questions about anything that might not be clear to you. Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation.

Approval to undertake this research has been obtained from Ulster University Business School Research Ethics Filter Committee.

#### 1. What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to investigate entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. Augmented SME growth is a concept that recognises SME leaders as critical catalysts in profit maximisation but also social growth that contributes to sustaining wider community health, prosperity and well-being. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the economic and socially enabling leadership style of entrepreneurial leadership that attains augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. The significance of the research is to contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial leadership in commercial NI SMEs and their role in enriching local community prosperity and well-being.

#### 2. Why am I being asked to participate?

You are being asked to participate in the online survey because you are an entrepreneurial leader of an SME. You may be asked to participate in an online interview after you have completed the online survey. There is an opt-in question at the end of the online survey where you can share your email with the researcher. The online interview will explore, at a deeper level, the implicit activities of the entrepreneurial leader in generating augmented SME growth.

3. How do I participate?

Participation is firstly by means of completing an online survey where a link will be made available for you to complete the survey online. In the case of opting for a further online interview you will be asked to share your email address with the researcher at the end of the online survey.

Should you be selected for an online interview the researcher will contact you via email directly to arrange a convenient time. The interview should take 45 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be recorded, and the researcher may make handwritten notes, this is to ensure accuracy.

4. What if I change my mind?

Once you have completed and submitted the online survey it is impossible to withdraw it as it is anonymous, and I will be unable to locate it.

Should you decide to opt for an online interview, you can withdraw this consent at any time before the interview takes place. You will not be asked to give a reason for your decision to withdraw. However, once the online recorded interview is complete, you have 24 hours to withdraw. After 24 hours the interview data will not be able to be withdrawn and your data will be used as part of the analysis.

5. What are the potential benefits of participating in this study?

By taking part in this research, you will not receive any direct benefit but your participation does benefit the research community for entrepreneurial leadership and SMEs which may have implications for policy and support for SMEs in the future.

6. What are the potential risks of participation in this study?

There are no potential risks of participating in this study.

7. What if I have a complaint about the research process?

Should you wish to speak to an independent person regarding this research, you can contact:

Nick Curry, Head of Research Governance, [n.curry@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:n.curry@ulster.ac.uk).

The University has procedures in place for reporting, investigating, recording and handling adverse events should they happen. Full details of Ulster



University's research complaints procedure can be found here: <http://research.ulster.ac.uk/rg/02078ResearchVolunteerComplaintsProcedure.pdf>

8. What will happen to my information and responses?

Online Survey:

The researcher has completed the University of Ulster GDPR training and Research Integrity Training Course. All data will be processed using the software IBMSPSS V25 and stored safely.

Online Interview

During the online interview (MS Teams), discussions will be recorded, (subject to signed participant consent) and these recordings will be transcribed. The recordings will then be deleted, individual responses will be anonymised (your name will be coded) and identification will be accessible only by the researcher. Interview transcripts will be shared with the participants after the transcription to validate accuracy. Participants are then invited to amend, delete, or add to the transcription. Audio recording will be conducted on a university owned device which has a high level of security. The researcher may use direct quotes from participants within the final report to illustrate findings, however participants will not be identifiable. Information is analysed electronically, however in the case that transcripts are printed, these copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Both the online survey and online interview data collected will comply with the Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR. All research materials will be stored anonymously for 10 years and then securely disposed. You can access Ulster Universities GDPR policy at the following link: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/about/governance/compliance/gdpr/gdpr-policy>

The data may also be used to inform reports, policy documents, academic articles and dissemination of results at academic conferences.

9. What if I have further questions about this research study?

You can find out more about this research by contacting one of the research team:

Professor Heather Farley: [h.farley@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:h.farley@ulster.ac.uk)

Dr Darryl Cummins: [d.cummins@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:d.cummins@ulster.ac.uk)

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet**

## Appendix 3 Questions for semi-structured interview and guide for participants



### In-depth semi-structured interview

Thesis Title: An investigation into Entrepreneurial Leadership and augmented SME growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

#### Dialogue of researcher at the beginning of the on-line interview:

*My name is Nikki McQuillan, and I am a lecturer and a part-time doctoral researcher at Ulster University Business School. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this on-line interview. Before we begin may I just confirm that you have read the participant guide and emailed me an electronic copy of your signed participant consent form?*

*This semi-structured interview focuses on you as an entrepreneurial leader of an SME and your role in generating augmented SME growth in your business. The interview should take 45 minutes to conduct. The information you provide will be treated as confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this research. No data will be passed to 3rd parties and no individual companies will be identified. The study has been granted ethical approval by the University of Ulster Business School Filter Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact: [h.farley@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:h.farley@ulster.ac.uk) If you would like to receive the results of the study please contact: [n.mcquillan@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:n.mcquillan@ulster.ac.uk)*

#### Purpose of Research

This research aims to investigate entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. Augmented SME growth is a concept that recognises SME leaders as critical catalysts in profit maximisation but also social growth that contributes to sustaining wider community health, prosperity and well-being. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the economic and socially enabling leadership style of entrepreneurial leadership that attains augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. The significance of the research is to contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial leadership in commercial NI SMEs and their role in enriching local community prosperity and well-being.

**Survey Aim:** The aim of this survey is to identify entrepreneurial leaders who attain augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

### In-depth Interview questions

#### The entrepreneurial leader and economic growth

1. Why did you decide to start this business? (Years in business? \_\_\_\_)
2. What are the main indicators that you use to measure your business performance?
3. What does business growth mean to you?
4. Why is it important for you to grow your business financially?
5. Is there any reason (or reasons) that you would not want to grow your business?

### **The entrepreneurial leader and social growth**

1. What does social growth (CSR) mean to you in your business?
2. What community engagement activities does your business commit to?
3. Do you measure this engagement? (CSR)
4. Are you involved in any business/community greening initiatives?
5. Who decides on community engagement activities for your business and why?
6. Explain why community engagement is important to your business? (Caring, well-being, ethics, development of employees, leaders intentions).
7. Why do your employees commit to community engagement?
8. Is wider collaboration with other local businesses important to your business?
9. How do you garner reciprocal respect between your business and the community?
10. Are you proud of your local community?
11. Are you proud of your business contribution to the local community?
12. Do you feel that you have a responsibility to contribute to your local community?
13. Do you believe members of your local community would be proud of your business?

### **Employee Engagement in social growth (only answered if there are employees)**

Do you encourage your employees to engage in community initiatives and if so, why?  
 Do your employees volunteer in local community activities? Why?  
 Do you engage your staff in any greening activities? Why?  
 Are there any other social growth activities that your business engages with?  
 Do you offer any initiatives to address your employee wellbeing? Why?  
 To what extent do you collaborate with any other businesses in the local area? Why?  
 How do you garner reciprocal respect between your business and the community?

*Thank you for participating the interview is now terminated. Researcher to note their immediate reflections after the interview.*

## Appendix 4 Participant consent Forms – qualitative data collection

**Participant Consent Form (On-line Interviews)**

**Title of Project:** An investigation in entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs

**Name of Chief Investigator:** Professor Heather Farley

**Please initial and sign the following statements to indicate informed consent. Once completed electronically please return in PDF format to: [n.mcquillan@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:n.mcquillan@ulster.ac.uk)**

<b>Statement of Consent by participant for on-line interview</b>	Please initial each box by way of consent electronically
1. I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way	
3. I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data	
4. I agree that the on-line interview will be <u>recorded</u> for research purposes only.	

Participant Name (Please Print)	Participant Electronic Signature	Date

PhD Researcher's Name (Print)	PhD Researcher's Signature	Date
Nikki McQuillan		

## Appendix 5 Research ethics application

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

RESEARCH GOVERNANCE

**RG1a APPLICATION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH ON HUMAN SUBJECTS**

**PLEASE REFER TO THE NOTES OF GUIDANCE BEFORE COMPLETING THIS FORM.** (Available from the Research Governance website at <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/rg/>)

All sections of this form must be completed (use minimum font size 11). If the form is altered in any way it will be returned unconsidered by the Committee.

This form should be used for research in categories A, B and D

Do not use this form for research being conducted in collaboration with the NHS/HPSS (category C).

**SECTION A****Chief Investigator**

Professor Heather Farley

**Title of Project**

An investigation into entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

**Student and course (if applicable)**

Nikki McQuillan - PhD Researcher (Part-time).

**Additional Investigators**

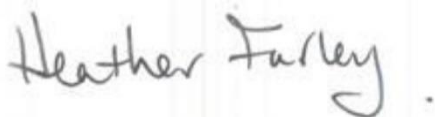
Dr Darryl Cummins

PhD Supervisor

**Declaration - Chief Investigator:**

I confirm that

- this project meets the definition for research in category\* (*please insert*) A
- this project is viable and is of research or educational merit;
- all risks and ethical and procedural implications have been considered;
- the project will be conducted at all times in compliance with the research description/protocol and in accordance with the University's requirements on recording and reporting;
- this application has not been submitted to and rejected by another committee; and
- Permission has been granted to use all copyright materials including questionnaires and similar instruments

**Signed**

**Date:** 12/11/2020

**Once complete, this application and all associated materials must be submitted for**

**\*In addition, you should complete form RG1d for all category D research and form RG1e for both category B and D research**

#### **Peer Review**

- *Those conducting peer review should complete form RG2 and attach it to this form (RG1). RG1, RG2 and all associated materials should then be returned to the Chief Investigator.*
- *Depending upon the outcome of peer review, the Chief Investigator should arrange to submit to the Filter Committee, resubmit the application for further review or consider a new or substantially changed project. The application must not be submitted to the Filter Committee until the peer review process has been completed (except as permitted below)*

#### **Filter Committee**

- *The application must be considered by the Filter Committee in accordance with the requirements of the University*
- *The Filter Committee should complete form RG3 and write to the Chief Investigator indicating the outcome of its review*
- *Depending upon the outcome of the Filter Committee review, the Chief Investigator should arrange to proceed with the research OR submit to the University's Research Ethics Committee OR resubmit the application for further review OR consider a new or substantially changed project*
- *The Filter Committee should retain a complete set of original forms.*

### **SECTION B**

#### **1. Where will the research be undertaken?**

The research will be collected via an on-line survey and the interviews will be conducted on-line using MS Teams.

#### **2. a. What prior approval/funding has been sought or obtained to conduct this research? Please also provide the UU cost centre number if known**

N/A

#### **b. Please indicate any commercial interest in/sponsorship of the study**

None

### 3. Duration of the Project

Start: December  
2020

End: July 2022

Duration: 16 months

### 4. Background to and reason(s) for the Project

**Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of every economy (Eggers, 2020 p199). However, government reports in the UK and SME growth research are preoccupied with measuring success using quantitative metrics of sales, profit, job creation and asset growth (Wiklund et al., 2003). In reality leaders of SMEs also exhibit social growth by way of contributing to community prosperity and enhancing social cohesion (OECD, 2019). Remarkably, the positive impact of these businesses on societal economic resilience and social cohesion appears to be of less interest to government reporting and economic policy (Gasparin et al, 2020). Eggers et al. (2013) assert that success in SMEs is no longer only viewed as financial success as there is a trend toward SMEs being measured through a broader lens to also consider their impact on community prosperity. Indeed, John Longworth (CBI) urged government “to focus on measures that will create an environment that promotes enterprise and boosts the confidence of small businesses, so they can continue to be the backbone of long-term economic growth and community prosperity” (The Guardian, 2014).

SME growth is typically determined by the decision-making behaviour of entrepreneurial leaders (Hauser et al, 2020) whose assumed primary purpose is annual profit maximisation as a measure of success through business growth (Hermans et al, 2015). However, some SME entrepreneurial leaders exhibit explicit CSR activities to demonstrate community integration within their business model. Nonetheless, there are also entrepreneurial leaders within a wider body of SMEs who have little desire to grow their business (Anderson and Ullah, 2014), yet enable profit and *implicit* positive social value for wider community prosperity. Arguably, these ‘emergent’ entrepreneurial leaders have an economic and socially enabling leadership style that will generate ‘augmented’ SME growth. Augmented growth is defined for this research to be the compounded sum of economic and social growth in SMEs. Augmented SME growth is a concept that recognises SME leaders as critical catalysts in profit maximisation but also social growth that contributes to sustaining wider community prosperity and well-being.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs. It is anticipated that the research findings may influence policy makers to utilise richer measures of business growth beyond ‘job creation’, using ‘augmented growth’ as a measure of SME business success. This could underscore the importance of resourcing the local enterprise eco-system to support SMEs that sustain ‘augmented’ growth whereby enhancing local community prosperity and well-being. Furthermore, the research intends to publicise the agency of ‘emergent entrepreneurial leaders’ of SMEs as critical catalysts in attaining augmented SME growth and manifesting a more meaningful growth metric for government reporting.

## 5. Aims of the project

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

The aim of this research is to investigate entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

To achieve the research, the following **objectives** have been established:

- To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth particularly in economic and social terms.
- To explore the concept and potential impact of augmented SME growth
- To develop a conceptual framework to further illustrate the relationship between emergent entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth
- To make recommendations in relation to the potential role and/or measurement of SME augmented growth as a purposeful indicator of social and economic impact.

## 6. Procedures to be used

### a. Methods

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

This research intends to adopt a mixed methods research approach using an on-line survey and on-line interviews to investigate the relationship between the SME entrepreneurial leader and augmented growth. The study intends to follow the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Stage 1 is an online survey targeting 400 (circa) SMEs (0-249 employees) in Northern Ireland to identify any associations or correlations in the variables of the emergent entrepreneurial leader and augmented SME growth. Stage 2, the qualitative stage, explores these variables further through interviews with 15 entrepreneurial leaders (selected from the quantitative study) to consider aspects of the research question in more detail and build on the quantitative study findings.



## b. Statistical techniques

The primary statistical techniques used from the data collected from the on-line survey will be nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio calculations. These will be tested using SPSS v25. There will also be a test for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. The required level of precision of the stage 1 of data collection be +/- will 5%. Using Saunders et al (2019 p281) the calculation of the sample size for this research study would be completed questionnaires from circa 400 small businesses with 0-249 employees in Northern Ireland from a population of 124,000 SMEs.

The primary outcome measure for the study is to find correlations or associations in the economic and socially enabled behaviours of the ambitious entrepreneurial leader that stimulate augmented SME growth outcomes.

## 7. Subjects:

### a. How many subjects will be recruited to the study (by group if appropriate)?

Entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs, 0-249 employees. (on-line interviews)	15
Entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs (On-line survey)	400 (circa)

### b. Will any of the subjects be from the following vulnerable groups -

	YES	NO
Children under 18		X
Adults with learning or other disabilities		X
Very elderly people		X
Healthy volunteers who have a dependent or subordinate relationship to investigators		X
Other vulnerable groups		X

### If YES to any of the above, please specify and justify their inclusion

N/A
-----

### c. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Please indicate, with reasons, the inclusion criteria for the project

Inclusion of owner founder entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs who employ between 0-249 employees and have been in business more than one year
--

Please indicate, with reasons, any exclusion criteria for the project

Non founder leaders or managers/supervisors of SMEs.

**d. Will any inducements be offered? If 'Yes', please describe**

No

**e. Please describe how and where recruitment will take place**

A representative of SMEs in Northern Ireland has agreed to circulate the on-line survey link for completion, through their database of members. The industry body is Enterprise Northern Ireland who support the SME sector in Northern Ireland (0-249 employees) and communicates with 3000 SMEs on a weekly basis throughout the local enterprise agency network. The researcher will seek approval for the questionnaire to be circulated around the network via email with an endorsement by ENI for completion. It is anticipated that from the completed on-line questionnaires 15 SME entrepreneurial leaders will be recruited for a follow-up on-line interview.

**8. Ethical implications of the research**

Please provide an assessment of the ethical implications of the project

Ethical considerations are fully discussed in the Research Protocol (Section 7 – Ethical Considerations). It is anticipated that there would be no ethical implications with the participants as owner entrepreneurial leaders of Northern Ireland SMEs for this study. It is prudent though to mention the impact of Covid19 on SMEs in Northern Ireland and the researcher will be sensitive to this if discussed during the participant interviews. In addition, the implications of Brexit may have some ramifications on the sensitivities of entrepreneurial leaders of SMEs. Approval to proceed will be in accordance with the ethical standards of Ulster University and the Ulster University Business School Ethics Filter Committee. The researcher has also successfully completed the Research Integrity and GDPR Course for Ulster University.

**9. Could the research identify or indicate the existence of any undetected healthcare concern?**

Yes  No

If **Yes**, please indicate what might be detected and explain what action will be taken (e.g. inform subject's GP)

**10. Risk Assessment \*\***

Please indicate any risks to subjects or investigators associated with the project

Any potential for risk is related to no. 9 above and again it is important to mention the ramifications of Covid19 and the impact this has had on the SME sector. It is unlikely as part of the on-line survey and interviews that individuals will be at risk. The participant guide is available before participants are engaged in the study should anyone have any further questions the researcher will ensure there is opportunity to asks questions before the interview begins. Please refer to RG1c.

**11. Precautions**

Please describe precautions to be taken to address the above

Limitations to confidentiality will be explained verbally and supplemented by written information in the participant guide (Appendix A). Limitations to confidentiality apply where potentially legitimate concerns have arisen which identifies risk or harm to an individual, illegal or professional misconduct and such concerns are required to be reported to the supervisors of this researcher. However additional precautions are not anticipated to be needed at this point

**12. Consent form**

It is assumed that as this study is being conducted on human subjects, an information sheet and associated consent form will be provided. A copy of the information sheet and form must be attached to this application. See Notes of Guidance.

**If a consent form is not to be used, please provide a justification:**

N/A

**13. Care of personal information**

Please describe the measures that will be taken to ensure that subjects' personal data/information will be stored appropriately and made available only to those named as investigators associated with the project.

The researcher will abide by the Data Protection Action (2018) (DPA) and General Data Protection Regulation (2018) (GDPR). The researcher has completed successfully an on-line course via Blackboard Learn the Research Integrity and GDPR course.

Stage 1 Data - All data will be processed using the software IBMSPSS V25 and stored as required by the Data Protection Action (2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (2018) at Ulster University anonymously for 10 years and then securely disposed.

Stage 2 Data - Recorded online interviews will be take place using Microsoft Teams and will be conducted on a university owned device. Responses will be transcribed and stored on a university security protected computer. The recordings will then be deleted, the recordings will be deleted once the interviews have been transcribed and individual responses will be anonymised (names will be coded) and identification will be accessible only by the researcher. Any written material will be anonymised and stored in a lockable filing cabinet. All of the research material, as required by data protection policies will be retained for 10 years and subsequently securely disposed of.

**14. Copyright**

Has permission been granted to use all copyright materials including questionnaires and similar instruments?

Yes  No

If **No**, please provide the reason

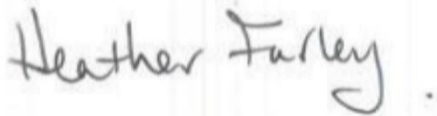
N/A. Questionnaires and relevant instruments have been designed by the researcher.

**Once you have completed this form you should also complete form RG1d for all category D research and form**

## Appendix 6 Risk assessment record

## Risk assessment Record

Faculty/School/Research Institute Ulster University Business School	
Name of Chief Investigator Professor Heather Farley	Room No/Campus 01K22 Jordanstown Campus
Project Title An investigation into entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.	
Hazard(s) – Please identify and describe There are no potential hazards to this research as all data will be collected on-line to individuals who own and lead their own SME. However, it is important to mention the ramifications of Covid19 and the impact this has had on the SME sector. It is unlikely as part of the on-line survey and interviews, that individuals will be at risk of any hazard induced by the research instruments. Therefore the potential harm is 'low' and the probability is 'unlikely'. The participant guide is available before participants are engaged in the study should anyone have any further questions. Therefore there is <u>no</u> inherent or residual risk to this research study. It is intended that even if the pandemic passes, the stage 2 interviews will be conducted on-line and not face to face, so social distancing is not relevant in relation to Covid19.	
Who is exposed to the hazard? (e.g. University staff/students/other research subjects) No persons are exposed to the hazard of Covid19 as all data collection will be on-line.	
Inherent Risk (i.e. the risk present before any precautions are put in place) – Please refer to the table overleaf to assess the risk and then record it below None <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> x      Low <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Very High <input type="checkbox"/>	
Controlling the Inherent Risk N/A  For inherent risk in the medium to very high range, please describe the precautions to be put in place:  Will these precautions eliminate, significantly reduce or otherwise reduce the inherent risk? Please comment:	
Residual Risk  Please refer to the table overleaf to assess the remaining risk and then record it below None <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> x      Low <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Very High <input type="checkbox"/>  Please note that if the residual risk is not in the none/low range, you might need to take further steps to address the risk or consider redesigning your research proposal	
I confirm that an appropriate risk assessment has been conducted	

	10/11/2020
Signature..... (Chief Investigator)	Date.....

Please use the table below to assess the inherent risk and then the residual risk. For example, where the **potential harm** is assessed to be minor (e.g. slight physical discomfort or pain, temporary emotional upset or similar) and the **probability** is assessed to be likely, then the risk is deemed to be in the medium range.

It is expected that research being conducted by staff or students of the University will fall within the None to Medium range of risk. Studies that are likely to fall within the High to Very High range of risk are unlikely to be permitted to proceed.

PROBABILITY	POTENTIAL HARM				
	NONE	INSIGNIFICANT	MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR
UNLIKELY	None	Low	Low	Medium	High
POSSIBLE	None	Low	Medium	High	Very High
LIKELY	None	Low	Medium	High	Very High
ALMOST CERTAIN	None	Low	High	Very High	Very High

#### POTENTIAL HARM

INSIGNIFICANT – reflective of trivial, routine or commonplace day-to-day levels of harm

MINOR – unexpected event requiring minor remedial action e.g. first aid attention sufficient to treat minor injury, interview suspended due to temporary upset of participant

MODERATE – e.g. results in time of work, broken bones, hospitalization, reversible disablement, serious emotional upset or psychological reaction, threat of violence to researcher, potential legal challenge to the researcher or the University

MAJOR – e.g. loss of limb, loss of sight in one or more eyes, permanent disablement, death, irreversible psychological harm, violence against researcher

#### PROBABILITY

UNLIKELY – probably will never happen

POSSIBLE – might happen but would be an unusual occurrence

LIKELY – expected to happen sometimes

ALMOST CERTAIN – expected to happen frequently

## Appendix 7 Ethics approval: UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER RESEARCH GOVERNANCE

**RG3 Filter Committee Report Form 20027**

Project Title	An investigation into entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs
Chief Investigator	Professor Heather Farley
Filter Committee	Ulster Business School

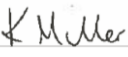
This form should be completed by Filter Committees for all research project applications in categories A to D (\*for categories A, B, and D the University's own application form – RG1a and RG1b – will have been submitted; for category C, the national, or ORECNI, application form will have been submitted).

Where substantial changes are required the Filter Committee should return an application to the Chief Investigator for clarification/amendment; the Filter Committee can reject an application if it is thought to be unethical, inappropriate, incomplete or not valid/viable.

**Only when satisfied that its requirements have been met in full and any amendments are complete, the Filter Committee should make one of the following recommendations:**

The research proposal is complete, of an appropriate standard and is in

- category A and the study may proceed\*
- category B and the study must be submitted to the University's Research Ethics Committee\*\* Please indicate briefly the reason(s) for this categorisation
- category C and the study must be submitted to ORECNI along with the necessary supporting materials from the Research Governance Section\*\*\*
- category D and the study must be submitted to the University's Research Ethics Committee\*\*

Signed: 	Date: 27/01/21
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\*The application form and this assessment should now be returned to the Chief Investigator. The Filter Committee should retain a copy of the complete set of forms.

\*\* The application form and this assessment should now be returned to the Chief Investigator so that he/she can submit the application to the UUREC via the Research Governance section. The Filter Committee should retain a copy of the complete set of forms for their own records.

\*\*\* The application form and this assessment should now be returned to the Chief Investigator so that he/she can prepare for application to a NRES/ORECNI committee. The Filter Committee should retain a copy of the complete set of forms for their own records.

For all categories, details of the application and review outcome should be minuted using the agreed format and forwarded to the Research Governance section

**Please complete the following**



The application should be accompanied by an appropriate and favourable Peer Review Report Form (if not, the Filter Committee should be prepared to address this as part of its review). Please comment on the peer review (include whether or not there is evidence that the comments of the peer reviewers have been addressed).

Peer review comments and responses are noted below. All comments have been addressed satisfactory.

Please provide an assessment of all component parts of the application, including questionnaires, interview schedules or outline areas for group discussion/unstructured interviews.

All documents are well developed, where the survey and interview guide are suitable for the purpose of the study.

Please comment on the consent form and information sheet, in particular the level of language and accessibility.

The information sheet and consent form are appropriate. Some minor amendments were suggested to refine the information sheet language.

Please comment on the qualifications of the Chief and other Investigators.

The principal investigator is a very experienced academic. The other supervisor also has significant experience. The PhD researcher has completed the research integrity course and other research methods training courses as part of her PhD and is a member of staff. Therefore the team are collaboratively well qualified.

Please comment on the risks present in conducting the study and whether or not they have been addressed.

This study is being conducted completely online due to Covid-19 therefore the risks are minimal to none.

Please indicate whether or not the ethical issues have been identified and addressed.

They have been identified and addressed.

Please comment on whether or not the subjects are appropriate to the study and the inclusion/exclusion criteria have been identified and listed

Respondents are being targeted due to being entrepreneurial leaders which is appropriate for this research.

Appendix A – Make reference to Ulster University Ulster Business School Research Ethics Filter Committee as opposed to Ulster University School Ethical Approval Filter Committee at the start.	Completed
Purpose of research could be condensed to simply identify the aim and why the research is important.	Completed
Could perhaps mention the purpose of the online interview also in the information sheet if it is different to the purpose listed at the beginning. For example, to tell them the interview is to delve deeper into issues or to tease out different issues.	Completed
Section 4 – Could be retitled to ‘What if I change my mind’ rather than do I have to take part since you state at the beginning that they should read before deciding to take part. They cannot withdraw at any time as if they fill in the survey, I assume you will have no means to withdraw their survey as it is anonymous. Similarly, you usually state a time after the interview being complete that they must withdraw, after which time they cannot.	Completed I suggested 24 hours after the interview to withdraw (see p18).
Section 5 – This is more benefits for you so you can state they will not receive any direct benefits but that they are benefiting the research community.	Completed
Section 6 could refer to risks rather than disadvantages and state there is no risks.	Completed
Section 7 – You need to cite the universities official complaints process rather than referring to your supervisor here. I also would retitle this to ‘What if I have a complaint about the research process’ rather than referring to only the interview here. However, I see you have a complaints section later so would suggest removing this section.	Have removed the duplication and have it in section 7 p18.
Section 8 is a bit repetitive as you have stated at the start that the study has been reviewed – perhaps take out if you want to keep it in at the start and refer to Ulster University School Ethical Approval Filter Committee.	Completed Have removed this as suggested
Section 9 – Remove the first line as you repeat it again later. Consider only referring to the Data Protection Act and GDPR once at the end of this section as it applied to both data collection methods. Put in a link to the GDPR policy of Ulster University.	Completed
Section 10 – Remove the first paragraph as it again is mentioning GDPR which you have already mentioned a few different times. Only mention it once in the document.	Completed
Section 13 – Would suggest removing as this is not normally included. You have already given contact details in earlier sections if they want to contact the research team.	Removed
Consent form – needs to have a section referring to the recording of interviews and get them to initial to agree. I assume the consent form is only for the interviews. The consent for the survey can be obtained at the start of the survey.	Yes consent form only for interviews – have a consent question in survey. Complete p21
Survey: Consider shortening the section on purpose of the survey – see comments above regarding this.	Completed
If you are not getting them to fill in a separate consent form for each survey, then include series of questions which they click at the start regarding consent. For example, that they consent to their responses being used for the purpose of research and may be used in articles/reports etc.	Completed See section 8 and consent question p 22.

Peer

<p>Query over the use of the phraseology in the screening question. Will they understand what is meant by original or successor entrepreneurial leader? Will respondents understand the term entrepreneurial leader and how does this differ from a manager or a CEO? Not necessarily a direct ethics question but something for you/your supervisors to consider. You may instead want to include inclusion criteria so they can judge if they meet the set criteria?</p>	<p>Completed See page 23.</p>
<p>Q22 – should the last option be 9+?</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>Is there a question missing at the end regarding opting into the interview?</p>	<p>Completed P 31.</p>

## Appendix 8 Summary of quantitative findings (Chapter 4)

<b>Summary of Quantitative Findings</b>			
<b>Descriptive Data</b>			
4.3 Descriptive Data – Northern Ireland SME Context			
4.3.1 Sectoral Representation			
4.3.2. Geographical Representation			
4.3.3 Age of Business			
4.3.4 Annual Turnover			
4.3.5 Family Business			
4.3.6 Size of Business			
4.4 Descriptive Data – NI Entrepreneurial Leader context			
4.4 The role and characteristics of entrepreneurial leaders in NI SMEs			
4.4.1 Entrepreneurial Leader – Role in the SME			
4.4.2 Entrepreneurial Leader – Age Profile			
4.4.3 Entrepreneurial leader – Gender			
<b>Variable Data</b>			
Independent Variable	Dependant Variable	Method of analysis	Quantitative Findings summary
The entrepreneurial leader lifestyle values, intentions and perceptions	Lifestyle Values and intentions (see 4.5.2)	Flat Data	83% selected work life balance as important-extremely important.
	Wellbeing (4.5.3)	Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	92% selected personal wellbeing as important or extremely important  No significant difference in the entrepreneurial leaders view of the importance of lifestyle values and wellbeing in relation to size of SME
	Stakeholder Perceptions (see 4.5.4)	Flat Data (Likert)  Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	87% indicated that being perceived as a 'caring leader' is either important or extremely important. More important than being successful (40%) knowledgeable (53%)  No significant difference in SME size and entrepreneurial leaders perception by stakeholders (community and employees).

The entrepreneurial leader enabling economic growth	Importance of enabling economic SME growth (4.6.2)	Flat Data (Likert)	Importance of business growth: 40% extremely important and maintaining growth level 34% said important.
		Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	'growing my business is' the tests showed that $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 9.74, P = 0.008$ . meaning there is a significant association between the sizes of business and the importance of 'growing my business'. 10+ SMEs rated growing their business more important.
	Obstacles to SME growth: Finance/capability/technology /time v size (4.6.3)	Flat Data	Managing projects and time pressures rated most important obstacle to business growth (38%) followed by finance (30%). Least important capability and skills (17%).
		Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 sizes of SME)	Finance: No significance Technology: No significance Time Pressure: No significance Capability: Significance in $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 8.23, P = 0.016$ . 10+ size capability is more of a challenge.
	Obstacles to SME growth Covid/Brexit (4.6.3)	Flat data	44% Brexit - Negligible Impact 10% positive 61% Covid – Negative Impact 20% positive
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	Brexit/Covid no significance v size.
	Priority Measures (sales, profit, job creation) (4.6.4)	Flat Data	49% Profit most important 29% Sales most important 5% Job creation – most important 16% Connecting with community -most important but also 43% least important. 60% of SMEs created or maintained jobs in last 12 months.
		Kruskal-Wallis Test (3 Sizes SME)	No significant relationship in size and importance of sales / profit.  Job Creation significant in relation to SME size $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 19.54, P = 0.001$ . The bigger the SME the more important job creation.  Importance of connecting to community significant $\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 16.23, P = 0.001$

	Primary Intentions enabling economic SME growth (4.6.5)	Chi squared Test  Flat Data  Chi Square Test	<p>The larger the business the less important to connect with the community.</p> <p>Job creation in last 12 months significant to SME size <math>\chi^2 (6, n = 204) = 121.91, P &lt; 0.001, \Phi = 0.399</math> SMEs with employees grew or sustained employment. No job creation in zero employees.</p> <p>95% of SME entrepreneurial leaders in the sample (n=204) intend to sustain and grow their SME in the next 3 years. 5% scale back their business.</p> <p>Significant in relation to size <math>\chi^2 (6, n = 204) = 32.525, P &lt; 0.001, \Phi = 0.399</math>. Zero 'ees; 14% reported scaling back more 1-10 'ees; 86% reported rapid growth more</p>
The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth	Importance of enabling social SME growth (4.7.1)	Flat Data (Likert)  Kruskal-Wallis Test	<p>Importance of engaging in community activities. Most popular - supporting young enterprise initiatives (48.5%) attending local B2B events at 48% of SMEs. Least popular – Board of governor at school.</p> <p>Educational placement showed significance <math>\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 18.22, p = 0.001</math> 10+employees more important activity.</p>
	Community Activities enabling social SME growth (4.7.2)	Flat Data  SPSS Frequencies analysis on percentage engaged in activity.	<p>Cumulatively the 204 entrepreneurial leaders engaged in 2.5 social/community activities whilst running their business. 51% sponsor local charities. Out of the 8 different types of activities (see 4.7.5) in relation to business size, sponsoring local charities was the most popular activity</p> <p>Zero ee's :31.8% 1-9 ee's 2:45.8% 10+ ee's 3:71.9%</p> <p>Analysis provides evidence of engagement in all types of activities (see section 4.7). SMEs with 10+ employees showed that 72% engage in sponsoring local charities, followed by Group 2 (1-9 employees) at 46%. It is interesting to note that the SMEs with zero employees also contribute significantly to local charities 32%. (see Table 4.7)</p>
	Community Relations and enabling social SME growth	Flat Data (Likert Scale)	88% of entrepreneurial leaders agree it is important to have a good relationship with

The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth	(4.7.3)		<p>their local community. 12% unimportant to have a good relationship with the community. Community as stakeholder in SME – 53% selected important. Embedding my business in local community development activities 79% selected moderately important or higher. Reciprocal relationships 65% selected moderately important or higher.</p>
	Social responsibility (4.7.4)	<p>Kruskal-Wallis Test</p> <p>Text open response – greater good</p> <p>Flat Data</p>	<p>No significant association between business size and entrepreneurial leaders enabling community relationships. Indicates unity of importance in community relations across all business sizes.</p> <p>29% entrepreneurial leaders gave 'other activities'</p> <p>79% ethics in supply chain important 76% efficiency and lean 75% optimising energy 62% carbon emissions 49% environmental processes.</p>
	Measurement of non-financial data v size (4.7.5)	<p>Kruskal-Wallis</p> <p>Flat Data</p>	<p>Significant only in efficiency and lean processes <math>\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 7.59, p = 0.02</math> SMEs with 10+ employees said more important.</p> <p>85% collect Customer feedback 85% 52% Employee Feedback 48% Efficiency and lean improvements 35% CSR 29% Community engagement measures 71% of SMEs do not see the value in collecting social impact data, do not know how to collect the data, or do not see any merit in collecting such.</p>
		Chi Square Test	<p>Statistical significance in some tests. Significance in 10+ (size) more likely to collect data on community engagement. <math>\chi^2(4, n = 204) = 22.028, p = 0.001, \Phi = 0.329</math> Less likely in 0-9 (Size) Out of 8 types of data collected 6 had significance (see 4.7.6) regarding size of business evidencing that the larger the business the more likely to collect non-financial data. Generally the bigger the business the more non-financial data is</p>

			collected for decision making. Was not relevant in some of the tests .
The entrepreneurial leader enabling social growth through employees	Community engagement enabling social growth (4.8.6)	Flat Data (Likert)	Encourage employees in community activities 38% of entrepreneurial leaders found this important/extremely important.
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	No significance between size of business and employee engagement in community activities
	Employee Wellbeing (4.8.2)	Flat Data (Likert)	94% of entrepreneurial leaders said employee wellbeing was important/extremely important for business growth
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	No significance between size of business and employee wellbeing
	Employee skills and knowledge Development (4.8.3)	Flat Data (Likert)	89% ranked employee development as important for employees
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	No significance between size of business and employee development
	Employee Appraisal and social growth (4.8.5)	Flat Data (Likert)	68% of entrepreneurial leaders selected the option important or extremely important for employee appraisals.
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	Significance with business size $\chi^2 (2, n = 204) = 15.69, p = 0.001$ More important in 10+ SMEs
	Employee Voice (4.8.4)	Flat Data (Likert)	Employee voice was selected important or extremely important by 76% of entrepreneurial leaders.
		Kruskal-Wallis Test	No significant association in business size and employees having a say in the business



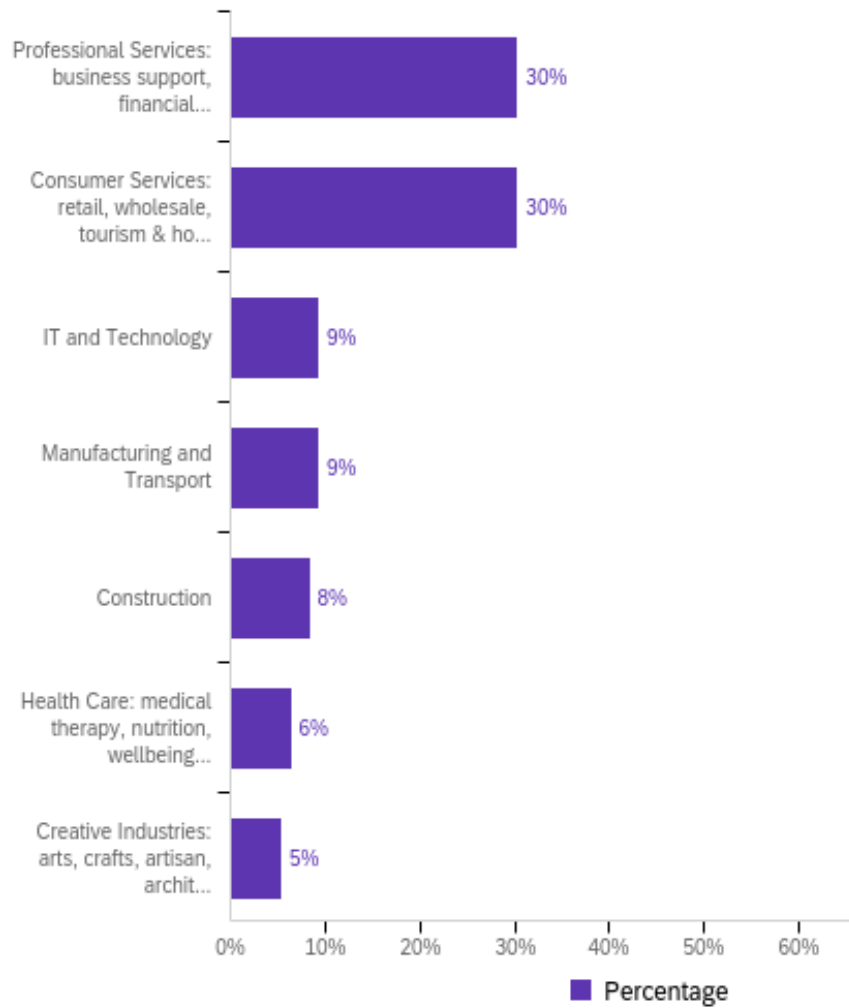
## Appendix 8a Sample sectoral representation

Business sectors are typically classified by a Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) based on their type of economic activity (ONS.gov.uk). The Office of National Statistics uses the 2007 revision to the Standard Industrial Classification (UK SIC 2007) in place of the 2003 revision Standard Industrial Classification (UK SIC 2003). The sectoral categories of businesses in Northern Ireland are listed below (Table 4.1).

### Sectoral categories of NI Business (Standard Industrial Classification)

Description	UK SIC 2007 Section	Division
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	A	01/03
Production	B, C, D and E	05/39
<i>Mining, quarrying &amp; utilities</i>	<i>B, D and E</i>	<i>05/09, 35/39</i>
<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>10/33</i>
Construction	F	41/43
Wholesale and retail; repair of motor vehicles	G	45/47
<i>Motor trades</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Wholesale</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Retail</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>47</i>
Transport & storage (inc postal)	H	49/53
Accommodation & food services	I	55/56
Information & communication	J	58/63
Finance & insurance	K	64/66
Property	L	68
Professional, scientific & technical	M	69/75
Business administration and support services	N	77/82
Public administration & defence	O	84
Education	P	85
Health	Q	86/88
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	R, S, T and U	90/99

Table 4.10 SIC (2007) Broad Standard Business Classification based on economic activity



Sectoral spread of survey responses (NI SMEs)

Whilst the survey sectoral categories were refined from the SIC to aid survey completion, the findings show that just under two thirds (60%) of the respondents were in the professional and consumer service businesses and 9% were represented from the technology sector. Manufacturing and transport represented 9% and the other sectors represented were, construction (8%), health care (6%) and creative industries (5%). Twelve businesses selected 'other' as a response and during the data clean, these were distributed into the relevant categories.

## Appendix 9 Qualitative analysis strategy and rationale for triangulation of data

### **Research brief:**

**Thesis Title:** An investigation into entrepreneurial leadership and augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs

**The aim of this research** is to investigate entrepreneurial leadership and their attainment of augmented\* growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

**Research Questions:** Do entrepreneurial leaders attain augmented growth in NI SMEs.

**The purpose of this research** is to investigate the economic and socially enabling leadership style of entrepreneurial leaders who attain augmented growth in Northern Ireland SMEs.

[\*The term 'augmented' is defined as 'making something greater by adding to it' and therefore augmented SME growth is inclusive of economic and social growth.]

To achieve the research aim the following **objectives** have been established:

- To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and SME growth particularly in economic and social terms.
- To explore the concept and potential impact of augmented SME growth.
- To develop a conceptual framework to further illustrate the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and augmented SME growth
- To contribute to the theory of entrepreneurial leadership
- To make recommendations in relation to the potential role and/or measurement of SME augmented growth as a purposeful indicator of social and economic impact.

### **Introduction to interview:**

This research aims to investigate the business growth intentions of entrepreneurial leaders beyond commercial goals. For instance, these entrepreneurial leaders also implicitly contribute to environmental sustainability, engage in pro-bono support, community engagement and employee well-being (if applicable). The significance of the research is to contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial leadership in commercial SMEs and highlight their impact on enriching local community prosperity and well-being.

Interview Question	Aligned to Survey Question no.	Rationale	Theme
<p><b>The SME entrepreneurial leader values.</b></p> <p><i>Preamble settling question: Tell me about your business...</i></p> <p>1. Tell me what is important to you in relation to your work/life balance (20-flex with personal/family time, inc.leisure time gym, maintain w/L balance personal 21-gen good for community 22 – wellbeing)</p> <p>2. As the owner or leader of your business how do you like to be perceived by people outside your business? (22-successful, 21-caring, 19- knowledgeable)</p>	<p>Q20 (38_2 &amp;3, 5) Q21 (23_3,6) Q22 (24_1,2)</p> <p>Q19, (18_4) Q21(23_5,6) Q22 (24_3)</p>	<p>EL Values, motivation and intentions for social impact</p> <p>EL Values</p>	<p>Work lifestyle values of the enabling EL</p> <p>Work life values of the enabling EL</p>
<p><b>The SME entrepreneurial leader and commercial (economic) growth.</b></p> <p>3. What does business growth mean to you and why? (13-scaling back/up; steady/rapid; 9/14 – job creation; 14- sales/profit/export/acquisition)</p> <p>4a) What could challenge your business growth during the next 3 years? (30/31 Brexit/covid/ Macro 15 – Micro (internal finance/capab/ Techn,time)</p> <p>4b) Do you feel there are opportunities for business growth during the next 3 years.</p> <p>5. Is it important to you to grow your business financially year on year? (yes why?/No why?) (yes – 14 sales/profit/inc.ees/comty connect 18-imp to maintain,grow, exit, export)</p>	<p>Q13, Q9, Q14, Q18 (17_1,2,4,5)</p> <p>Q15, Q30, Q31</p> <p>Q14, Q18 (17_1,2,4,5)</p>	<p>Estb. EL perception of business growth</p> <p>Internal/external obstacles/ opportunities to business growth</p> <p>Scale back/rapid</p>	<p>EL enables Economic growth</p> <p>EL enables economic growth</p> <p>EL and drive for economic growth.</p>

		Likert Q18(17-1,2,3); Sales/profit/com /jobs	
<p><b>The SME entrepreneurial leader and non-commercial (social) growth</b></p> <p>6a. What decisions do you make that means your business engages in non-commercial activities such as community/local charity?</p> <p><u>External</u> -19 relationships comty; b2b ev; 21-comty stake; 23-charities;YENI; locl grps;bd govern; forums; 24-locl fund raisers, sponsorship, 25-NED)</p> <p>6b. How do you feel about making your business more socially responsible?</p> <p><u>Internal</u> – environmental process/ethical supply chain buy local ;carbon foot; energy/utilities/efficiency/lean)</p> <p>7. Do you measure the outcomes of these non-commercial activities? if yes why? If not why?</p> <p>17 – custfb/eefb/commfb/supfb/ Sponsorfb/envirofb/mediafb/efficiencyfb</p> <p>8. How important is the common good (non-commercial impact) to <u>you</u> during the next 3 years? If yes why?/if no why? (CSR)</p> <p>9.How do you feel about building reciprocal relationships between your business and the community?</p> <p>(19-good rel.comty; 21-comtystakeholder/gen.good/ 23-vol forums; 24-reciprocal sponsorship)</p>	<p><u>External</u> Q16, Q19, (18_2,3) Q21 (23_3) Q23 (26_1,2,3,4,5) Q24 (25_2,4,5) Q25 (27_1) Q26 (text)</p> <p><u>Internal</u> Q19 (18_1. Q25 (27_2,3,4,5)</p> <p>Q17 (16_1,2,3,4, 5,6,7,8)</p> <p>Q16 (none/no) Q16 (yes/other)</p> <p>Q19 (18_2) Q21 (23_3&amp;6) Q23 (26_5) Q24 (25_5)</p>	<p>Understand the range, frequency and importance of enabling social impact. Internal (environmental) and external community outreach</p> <p>Economic is measured why not social?</p> <p>Is social impact important?</p> <p>EL Intentions and Relational Capital</p>	<p>Understand the range, frequency and importance of EL enabling social impact</p> <p>Non-financial business/social growth social Activities...do they continue YoY regardless?</p> <p>EL s-enabling leadership style.</p> <p>EL s-enabling leadership style.</p>
<p><b>The SME entrepreneurial leader and social growth (non commercial) (only answered if there are employees)</b></p>			

<p>1. How do you feel about engaging employees in non-commercial initiatives - why? (29-ees school &amp;com grps; ee fundraisers)</p>	<p>Q29 (31_3 &amp;4)</p>	<p>Intentions/planned behaviour of the EL</p>	<p>EL and s-empowerment in SMEs(enabling)</p>
<p>2. How do you feel about your employee wellbeing? Why? (28-resp. ee wellbeing / wellbeing activities)</p>	<p>Q28 (30_2 &amp; 29_8)</p>	<p>Intentions/planned behaviour of the EL</p>	<p>EL s-enabling leadership style.</p>
<p>3. How do you feel about employees developing their skills? (28-dev skills/profess dev/capability/confidence)</p>	<p>Q28 (30_1) (29_7)</p>	<p>Intentions/planned behaviour of the EL</p>	<p>EL s-enabling leadership style</p>
<p>4. How do you feel about employees having a say in your business? (28 – ees say?; 29 – ee appraisal)</p>	<p>Q28 (30_6) Q29 (31_5)</p>	<p>Intentions/planned behaviour of the EL</p>	<p>EL s-enabling leadership style</p>

### General Questions to finish...

Reflecting on your business growth what are your hopes for the future?

Is there anything else you would like to add to today's conversation that I have not covered maybe in relation to initiatives that are not directly related to the commercials of the business?

Do you have any questions for me?

Prompting Questions: Can you say a bit more about...? Is it easy for you to give me an example?

## List of References

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